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THE  
  
PRODIGAL SON

BY  
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STEREOTYPED BY WILLIAM W. HARDING, PHILADELPHIA.



TO THE  
BELOVED YOUTH OF MY CHARGE

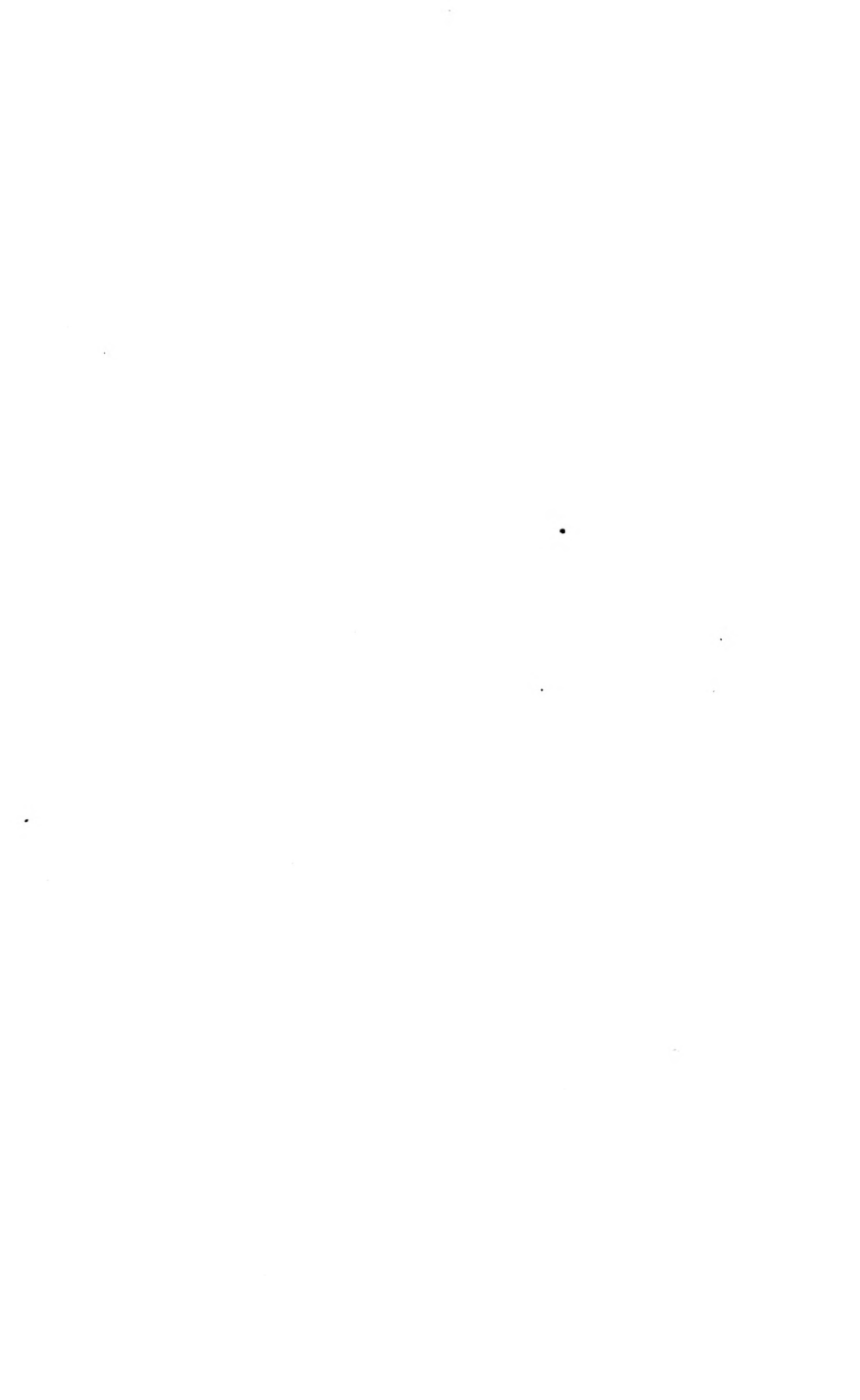
This Volume

IS

DEDICATED BY THEIR PASTOR,

IN THE HOPE THAT ALL OF THEM MAY BECOME THE  
RECLAIMED CHILDREN OF OUR

Father in Heaven.



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## INTRODUCTION.

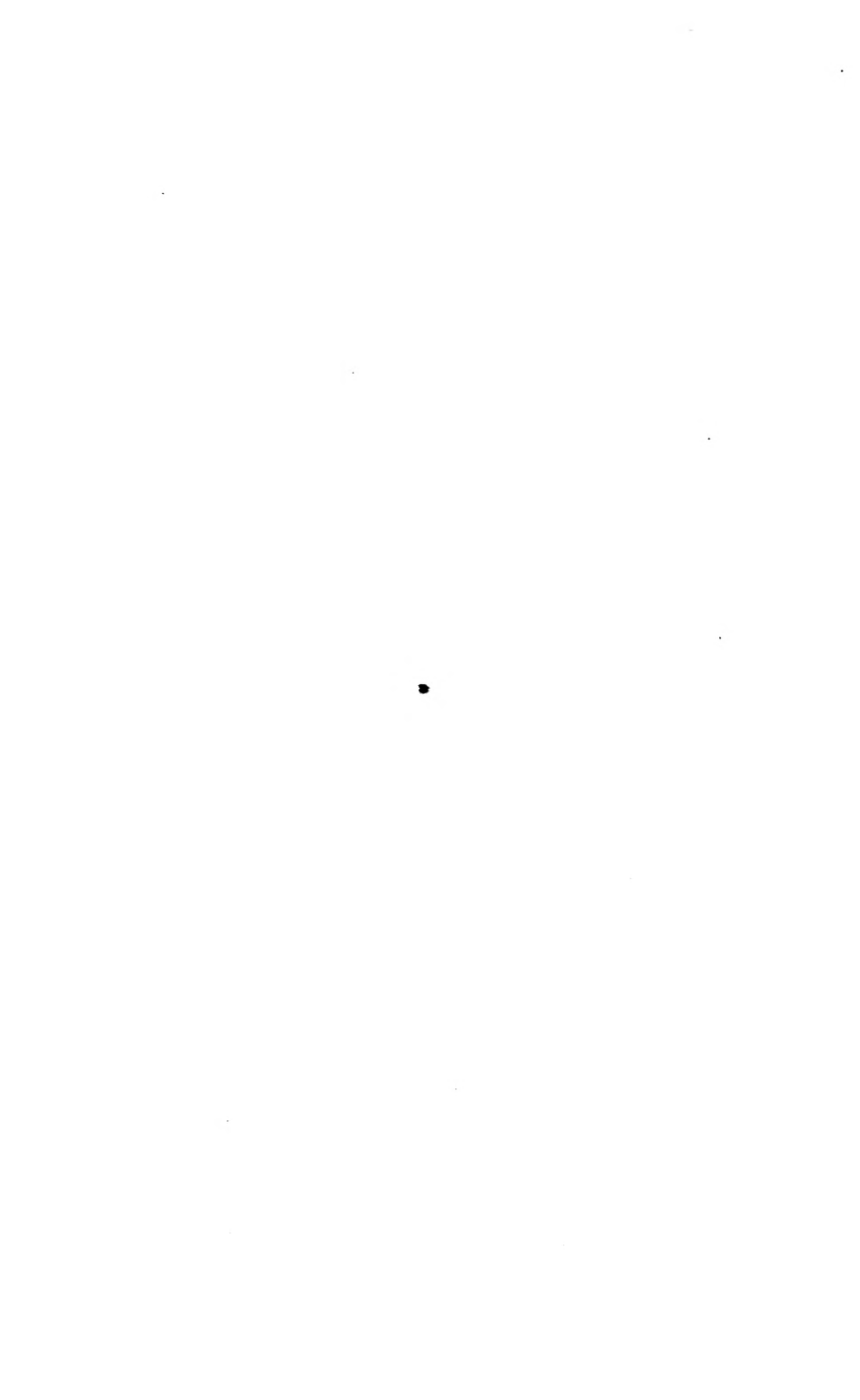
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THIS little book makes no pretensions to learning. It is not a dissertation, nor a commentary, nor reflections on the Parable of the Prodigal Son. It is simply a magnifying of the life-sketch of man's career, which our Saviour drew. It is an enlargement of the picture of sin and redemption as portrayed in this Parable. We have not gone outside of the narrative; but have endeavoured to weave everything about its leading threads.

Pretending to no originality, save in the combinations, we have availed ourselves of whatever material lay at hand. Besides the commentaries familiar to all, it is necessary to name an author to whom we are greatly indebted. In the years 1860 and '61, a series of articles on the Prodigal Son appeared in the "Independent." These were from the pen of the Rev. Dr. Tyng. We are not aware that they have been put in book form. From them we received many valuable suggestions and a few illustrations; most of which, if not all, are indicated as they are used.

The only motive in presuming to place this book before the public, is the hope, and earnest prayer, that it may do good; especially to the young. Besides, we do not know of any work on the Prodigal Son of this character.

G. S. M.



## THE PARABLE.

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A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want, and he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And when he came unto himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive

again ; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field ; and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come ; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in : therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment : and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends : but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad : for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again ; and was lost, and is found.—Luke xv. 11–32.



# THE PRODIGAL SON.

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## CHAPTER I.

### MAN AT HOME.

WHAT is a Parable? It is not to be confounded with a *Fable*. A parable is constructed to set forth a spiritual and heavenly truth. A fable has no higher aim than to inculcate maxims of prudential morality, caution, and foresight. A fable often supposes impossibilities, as that animals speak and act like human beings. A parable has no such impossible persons and actions. It never transgresses the actual order of natural things. A parable is deeply earnest; severe and indignant it may be, but there is no jesting or raillery at the weakness, folly, or crimes of men. The parable was a favourite mode into which our Saviour threw his teachings. That he employed such a mode of instructing, is sufficient evidence of its value. For he was wise, not only in *thoughts*, but likewise in his *modes* of thought. "Never man spake like this man," need

not be restricted to his doctrines ; it may extend to his wonderful facility in illustrating and enforcing those doctrines.

The oriental mind doubtless was well adapted to such figurative language ; and it was readily understood by them. But that the Holy Spirit hath kept these parables for us to read, shows that they are designed for minds in all ages of the world. While skilful interpreters have perverted the parables in their play of fancy, and wrought them almost into fantastic shapes ; doubtless God's people have made the right use of them in their reading of the word, and have drawn from them the designed instruction.

Around us God has placed visible objects, to make known "the invisible things of God,"—a ladder leading us up to the contemplation of heavenly truth. "This entire moral and natural world, with its kings and its subjects, its parents and its children, its sun and its moon, its sowing and its harvest, its light and its darkness, its sleeping and its waking, its births and its deaths,—is, from beginning to end a mighty parable, a great teaching of truth, a help at once to our faith and to our understanding."\* Man lost the key of knowledge, which revealed all this. His wicked heart became darkened. But Christ in these parables reawakened man to this knowledge. At his touch all things became new. The world answered with strange and mar-

\* Trench on Parables—Introduction.

vellous correspondences to another world within man. Hence the parables rested upon substantial ground. They were not buildings in the air, or paintings on the cloud.

Christ seldom gave doctrine in an abstract form. His were no skeletons of truth, but all clothed, as it were, with flesh and blood. By the aid of the familiar he introduced his hearers to that which was strange. And there is a natural delight which the mind has in this manner of teaching ; appealing, as it does, not only to the understanding, but to the feelings, to the imagination, and, in short, to the whole soul, calling all the faculties into a pleasurable activity. Things thus learned with delight are longest remembered.

Nor is it out of place to remark here, how much the parabolic element extends through Scripture ; not only as the *spoken*, but the *acted* parable. Every type was a parable. The whole Levitical constitution, with its outer court, its holy place and holiest, its high priest and sacrifices, each separately and all combined, were parables, teaching religion by ceremonies. Some would continue this. But as the ministration which exceeds in glory has come, that which had less glory is done away. The wandering of the children of Israel has ever been regarded as a parable of the spiritual life. So many of the acts of Jeremiah were parables *acted*. He breaks a potter's vessel, to foretell the complete destruction of his people. He wears a yoke to signify

their approaching bondage. He redeems a field to show that the land shall again be possessed by its original owners. These and similar acts arrested attention and fastened his prophecies in the mind; just as would a parable of words teach the same truth.

This parable of the Prodigal Son is the last of *three*, which were spoken on one occasion. They were called out by the circumstances of the moment, as were many of our Lord's discourses. He was surrounded by publicans and sinners; who had been drawn to him by his large-heartedness. He had none of the prejudice against them which the Pharisee manifested. He went to their houses. He was entertained by them. All this had given offence to the strict religionist. And as they saw these publicans and unclean ones crowd about Jesus, their ill-concealed dislike broke out in the low-toned sneer, which ran from one to another—"This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." To check this pride, which was elevating them above their fellow-sinners, Christ speaks *three* parables. And in all of them the *love of God* toward the sinner is the key-note. That love will not let man perish in the wilderness, but finds him and brings him home. That love will not let man lie buried in rubbish as a coin, but hunts diligently until he is found. That love receives him with kisses, and welcomes him with gifts, as soon as he returns to God; though, like the prodigal, he has abused a Father's good-

ness. And now the inference to these Pharisees was, they were not to call common or unclean those whom God would receive; and over whom angels would rejoice. And thus silently, this joy of heaven is contrasted with the bigoted and envious repinings which so abounded in their hearts. These parables together form a perfect and harmonious whole. In the *first*—that of the lost sheep—we have depicted the helplessness of man, his bewilderment in a desert, and his inability to find his way back to the fold. In the *second*—that of the lost money—we have asserted the claim of God upon man. As the coin was the money of the woman, so are men the subjects of Jehovah. They are his, because, like the coin, they bear his image and superscription in their souls, which are his breath; and in their bodies, which are his handiwork. To stop here, would be an incomplete description. It would give only the *Godward* side, what he does *to* man, and *for* man. Therefore in the *third* parable—that of the prodigal—we have those emotions which are awakened in man's soul, and the feelings wherewith *he* draws near this loving God. It speaks of his changed heart. For God does not forcibly carry men to heaven, as the sheep was borne by the shepherd. They arise and go to the Father. They *come* to Christ.

No one parable furnishes so wide a range of instruction as the parable of the Prodigal Son. It has been denominated “The Gospel within a Gos-

pel." It furnishes the preacher of Christ with a model discourse ; and according to the various parts of it, he is to present the truth. It is a universal text for preaching about the lost and recovered sons of our heavenly Father. Read the parable, and remark how admirably it is adapted to an awakened soul. We have thought that our Lord caused this parable to be preserved, that it might be a guiding-star to a soul bestormed on the ocean of religious inquiry ; cast about by adverse winds of doubt ; heavily laden even to the water's edge with transgressions ; and wearied by painful watchings, and unsuccessful labours. The parable first presents man at home, in the Father's house of plenty and happiness. Then in the heart is born the desire to wander. This desire grows in power until the separation is effected. Then away to sin man hastens. He plunges deeply into the waters of crime. He destroys his body, he blasts his prospects, he corrupts his heart. He sees, he feels his degradation and misery. He longs for a better condition. All this the awakened sinner can appreciate. Every word comes home to his heart. But *how* is he to get back ? This question the parable answers. It shows the willingness of the Father to receive, if the sinner will come with a penitent heart. To be a complete gospel, this parable needs only the Lord Jesus Christ, as a Saviour. And yet he who spake this parable *was* that Saviour. The hearers did not require that he should mention himself when he stood before them.

How simple and yet how profound is this whole narrative! How transparently artless as a chapter of human life! and yet how full of mystery as a revelation of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven! How perfectly natural is the picture as a whole! We read ourselves and our thoughts in every line. With what dramatic power is all related, so that every clause suggests in itself a whole history! With what force does every word arrest the conscience, and suggest to the reader—*Thou art that prodigal!* We all find ourselves reproduced in this parable; either *as we have become*, or *as we have ever been*, or *as we hope and endeavour to be—returned prodigals*. Well may it be termed the *crown and pearl* of the parables of Scripture. +f

The parable opens with a most delightful scene—a *happy home*. It was a home of refinement and peace. A father is represented as dwelling in abundance with his two sons. He was able and willing to supply all their wants. There was no necessity for them to go abroad in search of employment. The paternal acres and herds and stores of wealth were ample for them all through their lives. He was a father of great tenderness and love, and was deeply concerned in the well-being of his children. This is manifest from his readiness to receive the younger son after his profligate career. The father was not wrathful and impetuous, but greatly considerate of the frailties of his sons. This is seen in his calm and gentle rebuke of the elder brother.

In this we cannot doubt the Lord's intention to describe the original condition of man. To us, at least, it is highly significant of the home, in which man spent a few of his first days. God called that home *Eden*, which signifies *delight, tenderness, loveliness*. It was heaven on earth. It was as much like heaven, in its adaptedness to produce happiness, as the state of man would admit. There was no need for Adam to look wistfully beyond its limits for good; because all good was contained within its enclosure. Enough was there for all his wants, and even for the enlarged capacity of his soul, made after the likeness of God in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. And the *Father* was there. God came into that Eden. He conversed amid its groves with our first parents—angels probably visited that heaven below. Not so kind and considerate was the father in the parable, as was God to these his first-born earthly children.

Those sons in the parable had never known want. Their early years were not embittered with penury. They were never cold and hungry. And “Adam could no sooner see, than he saw himself happy.” \* The first emotions of his soul were those of joy. He saw “heaven above him, earth beneath him, the creatures around him, and God before him. He knew what all these things meant, as if he had been long acquainted with them.” \* Those sons in the parable had been protected from the evils of bad

\* Hall's Contemplations.



example. No profanity had fallen from the father's lips. His conduct had not taught them to break the Sabbath. They had never seen him at the gaming-table, or with the wine cup of intoxication. Assiduously he had set them an example of sobriety, honesty, and piety. And our first parents had only that which was lovely and pure spread about them. Angels were their companions; God talked with them. Uncorrupted thoughts filled their hearts. The beasts of the field were there, but from them they learned nothing that was unholy. The sweet warbles of birds were an harmonious accompaniment to the melody of their own songs of praise. And why, in this blissful abode, could they not have been content? It might have been a habitation of permanent enjoyment and rest. Oh, woeful hour! when they were tempted to look elsewhere than to God for pleasure!

The sons in the parable were either minors, or, having attained their majority, they still abode at home, as anticipating the possession of their father's estate. So that it was in the father's power to disinherit them, if they offended him. Precisely thus was man situated in that happy home of Eden. The father had not given him the deed to that blissful abode. It should be his, but only on the condition of perfect obedience. He was on trial. One hour of sin, even a single transgression, might dash to the ground his expectations. The trial took the shape of a positive command. He might eat of

everything save the fruit from *one* tree. To touch *that* was to lose his heritage. It is not worth while here to discuss the reason of that command. There was a cause for it. Children situated as were the sons in the parable, would be careful not to incur the displeasure of their father. Self-interest, if nothing else, would make them dutiful. And yet this younger son was *reckless*. He was so bold as to demand his share of the estate *before* the father's death. Could any act be more imprudent? Was not this almost a certain way to be disowned? And thus *reckless* was Adam. He must have known that God could not be trifled with. The very tree reminded him of his duty. One would think that Eve's hand would have dropped nerveless, ere she had half way reached to the fruit. And yet, with the threat right before them, they disobeyed.

And we are here on trial. God is giving us a chance for eternal bliss. A rich "inheritance among the saints in glory" is the promised possession of all who do the will of God. That is ours, on the condition that we become the sons of God by faith and holy living. On our becoming Christ's, hang the future glories of heaven for us. How solemn then the position we are placed in! Upon the decision we make in this brief period of life, depends our *eternal state*. And yet how *reckless* we are! Men live in open violation of God's laws, laugh at his providences, and grow bold and blasphemous in their opposition to heaven.

What greater recklessness can we conceive? Do we wash our hands from such a charge? Still there may be recklessness in us, equally fatal, though not so daring. He is *reckless* who delays ~~✱~~ his soul's salvation. He is *reckless* who, witnessing death on every side, fails to prepare for his own death. He is *reckless* who lives without the love of God in his heart, and without a well-grounded hope in Christ as a Saviour.

## CHAPTER II.

## MAN SINNING.

*A certain man had two sons : and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.*

IN this world nothing is too sacred or solemn to keep out Satan. Israel was tempted and fell at the very foot of Sinai. *Immediately* after the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priestly office, there occurred the sacrilegious conduct of Nadab and Abihu. At the institution of the Lord's supper, Satan entered into the heart of Judas. And he entered into the heart of the younger son of this blessed family, who said, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." What selfishness ! How great a disregard of the feelings of his father ! How totally insensible had he become to the past and present kindness of that father ! All the patient watchings in infancy, and the guidance through boyhood, all this treasure of affection and love he repays with ingratitude.

"Sharper than a serpent's tooth it is  
To have a thankless child."

Similar ingratitude and folly characterized the conduct of the first children of God in Eden. The Lord God had done *everything* to render them happy. Peace and plenty surrounded them. He was their Father. He loved them, and they loved him. They should have continued in that love. The basest ingratitude, the most unfilial disregard of the Father, and an utter recklessness of all consequences, excite our indignation and pity, in the case of the prodigal, and of that other prodigal—our father Adam.

Do we wonder how Adam could sin in such a paradise? Do we stand aghast at his ingratitude? Ah! what he did in his first chosen course of disobedience, each wandering child of man repeats again, in his own individual experiment. A savage of the Pacific Ocean one day went into the cabin of a trading ship. His curiosity was excited by the many new objects around him, which he examined with interest. At length he saw a mirror upon the wall. He approached and looked at it; and there he beheld himself for the first time, in all his hideousness. He took only one view, and then fled in the utmost consternation. So this conduct of the prodigal is a sketch from life. In him we see ourselves. It tells us what we have done, or are now doing. Every man in whom love to God has no existence, is a prodigal son. Like him, he does not return *love for love*. He is pushing away the hand which has protected him all his life. He is stop-

ping his ears to the entreaties of a Father, who is pained at his obstinacy. He is not under the paternal roof. He is unreconciled to God. Is not this re-enacting the prodigal?

The prodigal's sin *began in his heart*. When he said, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me," he expressed only what had long been forming in his mind. The desire originated at first as a mere *suggestion*, which he banished with horror. But it came again and again, and he parleyed with it. Bunyan, in his Holy War, describes some of the inhabitants of the well-fortified town of Mansoul, as talking *over the wall* with enemies who were besieging the place, although this was strictly forbidden by the Prince. And by these *talks over the wall*, those citizens were poisoned in their minds towards the Prince, and rendered discontented. The prodigal *talked* with this desire to forsake his father, until his mind became alienated. He wanted to be his own master—

"Lord of himself—that heritage of woe."

✂ This desire grew into a determination, which was carried out, when he said—"Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me."

The wandering of the heart is but little considered; yet *there* the straying path begins. We devote our strength to *acts* and *words*, but not enough to *thoughts* and *desires*. We are not as deeply impressed with the fact that wicked thoughts

are sin, as we are that wicked acts are sinful. While we denounce evil deeds, we palliate the corrupt desire. But Christ reversed this judgment. He laid bare the heart, and showed how *from* it came evil deeds. His heaviest curses were directed to sins of the heart. The sin of *unbelief*, which is a sin of the heart, meets a heavier doom than Sodom's lewdness and open vice. "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for Bethsaida and Chorazin," who heard but refused to believe the gospel.

Too much we allow wayward and unhallowed desires to tarry in our hearts. An evil desire assails a young man—to take advantage of one's ignorance in trade, to yield to a sinful indulgence, to do anything disreputable. He does not at once commit the sin, but he talks *with it over the wall*. Beware! danger lurks in that parley. To be safe, like Ulysses' sailors, when the songs of the Syrens first were heard, he must *stop his ears*. Desires will wander in. They will fly over the walls. Needful then the exhortation of Solomon—"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

And what an alarming thought this truth presents to Christian parents! They may do all in their power to keep defilement and bad example away from their households; yet they cannot keep sin out of the hearts of their children. Temptation will assail them outside the household walls. Evil

and corruption they will encounter in the world. How shall all this be counteracted? Cultivate their *hearts*. Sow unsparingly the seeds of good desires. Fortify them in their *hearts* against temptation. And, what is surest of all, labour and pray for their early conversion.

*Sin does not confine itself long in the heart.* When unresisted appetite is allowed to rage, and no covenant is made with the eyes, at last the outward manifestation comes. The utterance, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me," is the first fruits of wandering. The *seed* was the desire cherished in the heart, "*Give me.*" In this is expressed the *discontent* of the son. He was no longer willing that his share of the property should be in his father's control. He wanted to use it as freely as he chose, and in the way which suited him. He was *impatient*. He could not wait until Providence put him in possession of the coveted wealth. He must run in advance of God, and have his money *now*. Such discontent and impatience lurks in all our hearts. We want to enjoy life, and we have our own notion of what is enjoyment. However, we lack the material which is to constitute that enjoyment, and our cry is, *Give me the portion*. Men think they have a right as creatures to expect from the Creator *their* portion of goods: and because they do not receive it they repine. And they are in a hurry. Providence moves too slowly. They want the coveted portion *to-day*.



All this manifests a desire to be *independent of God*. This was the germ of Adam's sin. It was the moving cause of the great rebellion in heaven. Thus Milton puts it, in those words which Satan addresses to the angels:

“ Will ye submit your necks, and choose to bend  
The supple knee ? Ye will not, if I trust  
To know ye right, or if ye know yourselves,  
Natives and sons of heaven ! ”

Adam wanted to be “as gods, knowing good and evil.” He fretted under this restraint of his Maker. What though all the trees of the garden were his to use and enjoy, *one* was not ; and that one denial was more painful than were all his privileges pleasurable.

This repeats itself in every child of Adam. It begins in childhood. Your little boy attempts very soon to assert his independence of you. He tries to break through the restraints which you impose. How he hankers after that forbidden thing ! How often he disobeys you wilfully ! And, dear reader, as you have watched and been pained at this manifestation of independence of you, has it never occurred to your mind that the proverb was meeting its fulfilment, “ Like father like child ; ” that as your child treats you, you are treating your Father in heaven ? That what is done in your household is ever being enacted in God's great family ? Do *you* never break over the restraints which a wise Father imposes ? Are you not now doing what he

forbids? Is not your condition this hour most unfilial? Your own household is a parable, teaching you the will of your Father in heaven. Reason from what you require of your children, to what God demands of you. Do to God as you expect your children to do to you, and you will cease to be a prodigal son.

There is another feature of the prodigal's conduct, which presents a practical lesson. He wanted his share of the estate *before the death of his father*. This shows that he cared more for the money than for his father. Alas! that gold and silver should so debase the soul. And yet it is no unusual thing. Somewhere in every person's heart abideth such a serpent. Our thoughts too often are on the wealth which the Father has placed all around us. We forget him in our desire to secure *our* "portion of goods." As this younger son ungratefully turned from his father to his father's money, so do we omit the love and duties which God requires, and become absorbed in the profit and loss of this world. In many hearts regard for God is as wholly wanting as was filial love in the prodigal. The entire bent of the soul is to the things of this life. With a selfish and heart-hardening zeal they bestow their days and their thoughts, their body and their soul, to gold and silver—God scarcely receives a passing thought.

Another important aspect of the prodigal's conduct must not be overlooked,—*his wilfulness*. There

was no excuse for him. His father was a most loving parent, and did all he could for the happiness of his children. This *wilfulness* of the prodigal is the discriminating fact in this parable, as compared with the two preceding, which also represent man as lost. The sheep went astray, but it was an unconscious wandering. The piece of silver was lost, but who was to blame? Not it, for it could not lose itself. But the lost son wanders *of his own accord*. One ignorant of man's history, finding him astray, would not know how he came so. This story introduces the absent part. Man wandered, *first* in his heart, and then in his acts. Wherever he is seen away from God, away from the path of virtue, holiness, and peace, he is a *voluntary* exile. "Thou hast destroyed *thyself*," is a Cain's mark branded on his soul. Man is lost *deliberately*. He rushes on to hell, looking at the flames, and hearing the cries of agony. The Spirit of God calls on him to stop. Minister and Christian friends implore him to turn from his evil ways, but he will not. He pursues the course of his own appetites, and bears the responsibility of his own choice.

There was stupidity and ignorance in the sheep. There was unconscious helplessness in the money buried out of sight. But in the wandering son there was *chosen* rebellion and ingratitude. And the like is true of every sinner. *He is a sinner by choice, because he wants to be such*. Reader! do you start up and inquire of me, "Do you not hold

that man is born with a sinful nature?" Yes.

"How then can I be called a *wilful* wanderer, when I was born with the wandering in my heart?"

From this position of original sin, we ask you to step to *actual transgression*. And what have you now to say? "Well, does not the depravity of my heart lead to these *actual transgressions*?" Without doubt. But that does not help you. For you *know better* when you commit these transgressions. You are a *wilful* sinner, because you sin with open eyes and an instructed mind. You are not an idiot nor a fool. What! can you assert that one who has always had a Bible at his elbow; who has gone to church Sabbath after Sabbath; who has had examples of godliness all around him; who was taught to pray at his mother's knee, and from his mother's lips learned the ten commandments—can such an one say he is not a *wilful* transgressor, when he quits the path of virtue and godliness, and walks in the way of his own heart, and not in the way of the Lord? What is voluntary sin, if it be not that?

## CHAPTER III.

## THE YOUNG MAN LEAVING HOME.

*And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country.*

NEXT to the Bible, the greatest blessing and safeguard enjoyed by the Saxon race, is *home*. You find no *homes* in Italy, Spain, or France. Certainly they are not in India, China, nor the isles of the ocean. Poets have sung of home, and the pulpit has explained and enforced its duties. Much has been written about it, but none too much. For the home of England and America is fast losing its peculiar features, which have hitherto made it a blessing. Hotel life and boarding-house life are rapidly taking the place of the dear home of olden days.

Some of my readers, who are away from home, can call up, daguerreotyped in memory, that happy place which was the home of their childhood. It did not seem so happy then as it does now when we look back upon it from this distance. For the older we grow, the dearer seems the home of boyhood and girlhood. Other scenes which we pass through

grow indistinct as years increase; but home, like the horizon, always preserves the same distinctness.

“Man through all ages of revolving time,  
Unchanging man in every varying clime,  
Deems his own land of every land the pride,  
Beloved by Heaven o’er all the world beside;  
*His home*, the spot of earth supremely blest,  
A dearer, sweeter spot than all the rest.”

Happy! thrice happy! are those who have had a home in which to be trained. No matter how humble that home, nor how defective the training there, it was vastly better than to grow up without such a shelter. We do not know how much we are indebted to the protection which home afforded our early days. Cast out the new-born lamb on a March morning; it will crawl to the shielding fence and live. Plant a sapling on the highway, and despite the gnawing teeth of the passing beast, and the untimely trimming of the school-boy, it will grow and bear fruit. But let the little child wander about, without ever learning that sweet word home; let him get a crust at your door, and a drink from the brook; pinched with hunger: struck by every cruel hand; without words of counsel or sympathy; thus beat about on the waves of life let him grow; and need we wonder that at an early age he swings on the gallows? The poor children of crime which we encounter at any corner in our cities, are to be pitied because they are *homeless*, or as bad as home-

less. It is no surprise that the State's Prison soon becomes their home. A great obstacle in the reclamation of the criminal and outcast, is that they have no home to live in. Blessed is the child to whom God gives a good home. And if in that home there be a kind father, and one whom you can call by that heavenly word, mother, and loving sisters, I charge you, young man, before God and men, do not leave that home without full cause.

All, however, cannot remain at home. Some leave necessarily; but others, because, like the prodigal, they love to wander. No lawful pleasure had been denied this younger son, yet a desire for a freer life, and larger indulgence, had sprung up within him. A home of plenty, a father's favour, a mother's care, a sister's tenderness, have become too tame for his distempered imagination and riotous blood. He wants to be out of his father's house, and beyond his discipline. He loathes this everlasting preaching about his conduct. He cannot stay in the neighbourhood. He must get so far off that no reports of his evil career shall come back. Just such folly there is in multitudes of young men, who are impatient of the restrictions of home and friends. And they never think themselves free, and their own masters, until they have broken all God's bands in sunder, and bound themselves with their own lusts. They cease not, and in the end break their mother's heart, and suffuse their sister's cheeks with shame.

This propensity to seek pleasure away from the family hearth, early develops itself in young persons, particularly in young men. *And it is the first step to ruin.* I find pleasant homes, around whose cheerful fireside the mother, and the father, and the sisters gather, and peace and quiet crown the evening; but I do not see the brothers there. Evening after evening they are absent, and until a late hour of the night. They are seeking pleasure in theatres, in revellings, in the billiard saloon, in the gambler's den, in the bar-room, in the house of the strange woman. When I find a young man habitually absent from the family-circle in the evening, whose occupation does not call him away, I put down his name on the list of those who are on the road to ruin. When I walk through a town in the middle of an evening, and find lads hallowing and running about the streets, assailing my ears with oaths and obscenity, clustering on hotel stoops and at the corners; I conclude that these boys are young prodigals. They are taking the first step in his career. *They are being weaned from home.* They are learning to love the rudeness and wickedness which shun daylight, rather than the gentler amusements which are found in the family circle. They are learning the pleasures of sin, before they have experienced the delights of home. And it is only God's preventing grace which will keep them from disgracing their parents and ruining their prospects for life.

Oh that, with far-reaching voice, I could get the



ear of every parent in our land! I would say to them, make home attractive. Make it a magnet. Study to please your sons while there. Tax your mind, if need be, that you may present inducements which shall make them love to be where you are. Let no rebuffs, or indifference, or coldness make them prefer the fumes of the saloon to the icy atmosphere of home. Begrudge not money for books, or music, or whatever of an innocent nature may amuse. This is a vital matter, and demands far more consideration from parents than it receives. Home is regarded by many as a mere sheltering place, or boarding-house; while all comfort and happiness are to be sought and found in the wide world. In not a few cases, parents have been responsible for the waywardness of their sons. Home has been gloomy or it has been *empty*. Those who ought to be there are seeking *their* pleasure in parties, and balls, and visits. When the *parent* goes abroad for happiness, no one can blame the child for doing the same. This sore evil have I witnessed in our cities. A large and splendid mansion, filled with all comforts, decked with the adornments of art; a most inviting abode, which one would think the inmates would never want to leave; and yet into it, like straggling bees to a hive, the occupants come at all hours of the night. The father goes to the club, the mother and daughters to the opera, and the sons to meet "*the boys*."

It is the Englishman's boast, that his house is his

castle. Every parent's home ought to be his castle. It should be a place of defence of his children. In feudal times the horn was sounded at sunset, which summoned all the inmates of the castle to the door, and at dusk the portcullis was let down, and none were admitted afterward; and none allowed to go out. And let the setting sun, which calls even the brutes to their hiding-places and the fowls to their trees, be the summons which shall convoke the household home, and *keep it there.* All domestic and useful animals go to sleep when the sun sets. The ox, and the horse, and the fowl are no night prowlers; that belongs to the lion and the owl. Nip in the bud all disposition to seek pleasure away from home.

The younger son gets his wish. The father divides with the sons his living. He foresaw that further constraint was useless. And as he could no longer be a father beloved, he will not be a master. The arrangements are made, and the parting moment arrives. All are sad, but this younger son. May be a mock sorrow flits over his countenance. He is in haste that the disagreeable farewell may be consummated. Would you look on that scene? Then recall the first time you left home to go to school or college; or to the adjacent town to learn a trade, or become a clerk. All are in tears. The father hangs on the son's neck with words of counsel, which glance away as an arrow from a rock. The mother clasps him to her bosom in a mingled

transport of love and grief; meanwhile praying in her heart that God would protect her boy. The brother grasps his hand with expressions of hope and cheer. The twining arms of a sister encircle him once more in a farewell embrace; while her sobbing, tender tones melt their way to his heart. And then he turns from this weeping circle, as his father in choking accents says, "God bless you, my boy."

O foolish youth! would that this sorrow could tame your wild heart! Would that it might awaken repentings! Could you see how that tattered, hungry, poor, debased, diseased youth, will crawl back to the threshold of this home: you now would turn in your steps, and remain under that happy roof. But away he speeds, like the unreined horse, wild with liberty.

Probably the most critical moments in a young man's life is, when *he leaves home*. He then encounters peculiar temptations. Perhaps he has been exposed to vice and immorality in his own town. But those salutary restraints which lay about him, are now removed. He is exposed to *equal peril without similar protection*. At home, he was under his father's eye. He feared that father. He was known in the community. He had a regard for the good opinion of his neighbours. But in a new situation no familiar faces silently chide him. None watch him, as he imagines. He can come in at midnight intoxicated, and stumble his way up stairs, and no mother's acute ear will detect his unsteady

tread. No sister will be awake to let him in. No father's eye, in the morning, will trace out the lines of dissipation. No such wholesome restraints hold back the young man away from home. Herein lies the danger, that he will rapidly advance in the downward course.

A fearful change is that which transports a youth from the quietness and simplicity of a country life, to the confusion and magnificence of a metropolis. He sees a style of dress, and a habit of expense, which demand the utmost of his means to imitate. He looks with a kind of awe upon those high in rank and station, and imagines that his advancement depends on imitating them. And jovial companions, with whom perhaps he first makes acquaintance, draw him away to ruin. The following drawn by a skilful hand and observing eye, is the sad career of thousands:—

“A beloved youth came to this city from his rural home, to enter into one of our great scenes and marts of merchandise. His early days had been watched in kindness, and spent in that ignorance which is really bliss, amidst the cherishing of his parents, and the tranquillity and harmony of the household in which he was born. He might have been almost said, never to have seen the shape of degrading sin—certainly of the most degrading shapes he knew nothing. The age of his maturity approached, and his opening desires asked for opportunities of activity and business in the world,

and his scarcely-yielding parents consented to his trial of a city life. He was placed in a warehouse of large engagements, and found his home in a boarding-house of respectability and good report. But in both he found the well-taught agents of evil. They laughed at his boyish innocence ; they called him green ; they scoffed at his scruples and avowed principles ; they reviled his purity as pretence and hypocrisy ; they awakened in him notions, desires, fears which he had never known ; until they shamed him out of his integrity, and left him to perish. He came to the church on his first arrival, and delighted in the Sabbath worship, and meant to pass his whole time on the side of virtue and truth. But this current of defilement swept him away. Not without many an agony, and a thousand heart-burnings and regrets, did he turn his back upon the sweet remembrance of his father's house, or break one by one the tendrils of his love and reverence that had entwined around his happy home. But break them all he did, in a sad and fearful way. They dragged him a willing disciple to the abominations of the theatre, that open door to ruin through which so many find the way to death. There was a real and conscious struggle within which he was ashamed to avow. But the first step settled all. The drinking saloon, the billiard table, the gambling hell, the house of the strange woman—all in an infernal procession followed. And fraud to supply his wants, and disease to consume his life, and disgrace to

brand his name, were the ripened results of the sad experiment. I cannot dwell minutely upon his history in the facts so well known to me. Oh! what a journey it was, and to what an issue it led. My soul sickens in the contemplation which the memory brings up to me. And yet his sorrowful confession was, he had never known one moment's peace, and had sold himself, in this rush of pride over weakness, to a constantly conscious destruction."\*

How many have awaked to consciousness in the far off country, and in the sty of wretchedness have pondered thus, as they recalled the home of early days. "That father's venerable form rises up before me, clothed with irresistible reproach. He did not chide in cruelty, nor blame unjustly, nor exact inordinately. He was full of tenderness, patience, and sympathy. How well I remember his evening prayers and his morning thanksgiving, and his holy walk in the dignity of home religion! That beloved mother, too, whose smile was heaven to me, whose love and tenderness never failed, covered my faults, and sweetly wiped away my childish tears. How I feel her gentle hand upon my head! Yes, I feel her warm breath upon my cheek, as if she had come again to life, to reproach me for the guilt and madness of my career. Why did I forsake that happy government? Ah! if I had never wandered; if I had obeyed my father's will, and retained him as the guide of my youth—what sorrow I should have

\* Dr. Tyng.

avoided ! What painful memories ; what unnecessary stains ; what deep humiliation !”\*

But let us present a cheering thought. A young man may leave home, *and do so safely*. Myriads have. While the shore is full of wrecks, out on the sea are many barks, which passed the shoals and pursue their way heavily freighted with precious stores. In every community are seen men, who left their father’s house at an early age, and who have risen to eminence. Inquire how this was done. The reply will inform us, that it was not by riotous living and by a spendthrift’s prodigality. Their evenings were devoted to self-improvement, not to pleasure. They were not present at every horse-race, nor found at the street corners, gazing impertinently at every lady passing by. Those who did thus went down long ago.

“A well-beloved youth, whom I knew, was a complete illustration of this restraining influence. Beauty marked his person—wealth adorned his condition. Every worldly attraction was around his dwelling. Every conceivable opportunity of indulgence was within his reach. His nature was earnest and vigorous. And though brought up under all the influence of religion at home, those who most wisely loved him, trembled for him, when his opening years forced him into contact with the world. His school and college life took him from home. His circumstances attracted around him the gayest

\* Dr. Tyng.

and idlest companions. His cheerfulness delighted in mirth. His talent made mirth at his pleasure for all. Ah!—few knew what he went through to test his principles and his instruction. His college companions stimulated the worst propensities within him. The array of books and pictures which form the secret agencies of defilement in our colleges, and aiding the influence of which are so many of the stories and allusions of classical learning, led him in one line of temptation to the very verge of ruin, —when the remembrance of his mother and sisters at home, so beloved, to be outraged by his compliance,—arrested him with the sternness of a resistless appeal, and he started back. His social relations brought him multiplied invitations to the card-table and the billiard-room; and again and again, on the eve of yielding, his pure and peaceful home came up again, and he had strength to utter a solemn No, and he never knew a game of either. The college supper more than once threatened his destruction in its provisions for intoxication,—and once only prevailed, giving him a subsequent shock which secured his final liberty. He came to maturity sadly tempted, but wonderfully restrained. He had strength given him to fight the battle thoroughly in his own heart, and needed not to unwind the habits of outward defilement and sin in open conduct. Grace found him a tried and chosen vessel, and made him a noble and shining instrument of usefulness to others. Ah! often in the course, his heart was tempted to



‘say,’ but the restraining Spirit interposed,—and never in outward, allowed rebellion, did he ‘say’ the language of sinful choice or sensual determination. Though tempted much, and seeing much,—from which parental love, had it all been known, would have gladly kept him back,—he still had strength given him to ‘flee youthful lusts,’ and to ‘keep himself pure.’ Why may not all thus start back, and make their stand there?”\*

I should be unfaithful to the gospel, did I not declare that *piety* is the main safeguard to the young man away from home. Mere moral principles are not so reliable as piety. And for the reason that morality has nothing but itself to lean upon, while piety has the promised assistance of Him “who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.” When I see a young man resting upon *moral principles* only, I have hope of him; but when I find him seeking day by day help from God, then I have *confidence, and dismiss all my fears*. Turning to the Bible, we learn that precisely this fortified the heroes of Israel, many of whom, in youth, were cast amid temptation. I might mention Joseph, Samuel, David, Daniel, and others; all of whom, in youth, left their father’s house. I will speak of only two—Samuel, when a mere boy, was placed in charge of Eli at the tabernacle. That man, though high priest, exercised no restraint over his sons. He was too easy a man to govern well his family or

\* Dr. Tyng.

Samuel. Hence Samuel had no salutary training from Eli. Besides, the example set before him by Eli's sons was very vile. The age, too, was degenerate; and piety was at a low ebb. Still Samuel maintained his purity. He developed into a great and good man. But if he had not been a praying youth, he would have been drawn into the vortex of crime which whirled around him. David was probably not older than eighteen, when he left the sheep-cot, and became armour-bearer to King Saul. From tending sheep amid the solitudes of Judea, he was made the companion of captains and military men, and officers of the royal household. Courts were as corrupt as in these days. Yet David did not suffer by this change. His morals and piety endured this exposure, and only grew the firmer, under severe trial. But David was a pious youth.

As our young men go out from home, we would have them pious. And why should they not? Ought not their early affections to centre in their heavenly Father and that Jesus who died to save them? Why waste this golden period in mere indulgence and in disobedience? But says the youth, I must have my pleasures and my joys. And because we *want you to be happy, we urge you to be godly*. "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and *all* her paths are peace." It is a flippant excuse, gliding from many tongues, that youth is the period for wildness and indulgence, which will soon run out, and that in the end they make as good men, and perhaps

better, than those who set out at the beginning to serve the Lord. This is a slander on early piety. It is trifling with God's warnings and expostulations. Who can utter such a sentiment after reading the Proverbs of Solomon? Each chapter, and almost every verse, of those Proverbs, expose the fallacy of such a maxim. The truth is, the cases are few, where youth, indulging in a guilty career, are reclaimed to virtue, usefulness, and piety, compared with those who never went astray, but grew up in the house of the Lord, and who walked in the way of holiness from the morning of life. No Christians make such attainments in godliness, in none is the savour of piety so fragrant, as those who consecrated their young hearts to God. "Far better Samuel's early choice than Manasseh's late but painful experience, or Saul's noonday conversion. Better, far better, to say with Polycarp, 'I loved Jesus in my youth, and he has never forsaken me in my age,' than to groan with Augustine, down to the very gates of death, over youthful sins and mature iniquities, however grace may have been made to abound in pardon over the numberless sins which it removes." \*

\* Dr. Tyng.

## CHAPTER IV.

## BAD COMPANY.

*But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.*

THE young man away from home seeks associates. And if he do not *seek* them, he soon forms acquaintances. For intelligent beings are social. The more intelligent of the brutes are the most social. The horse and the elephant in herds roam their native wilds. The bee and the beaver, each of which manifests an instinct akin to reason, live in communities, and almost seem to have a civil code. There is society and sweet intercourse in heaven. And in the pit of despair, so far as we know, there is no solitary confinement in separate cells, but in company the damned share their torments.

Man, peculiarly formed for society, has no joy in absolute solitude. God acknowledged this when he said, "It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make an help meet for him." And God brought to him just such a companion as he

required. Cut a man off from his fellow creatures, and he pines away in loneliness, as does the dove who loses her mate. In fact, so complicated are the wants of mankind, that only society, or man in combined action, can supply them. From society proceed all the refined comforts and superior enjoyments of life. And from society proceed *the greatest dangers and evils of life*. Sin has wrought such disaster and confusion, that the greatest blessings may be turned into the greatest evils.

Parents' hearts ache when they think that their children must encounter these same adversaries which once beset their own path; that they must walk over the same enchanted ground which they themselves trod, and must stumble upon the same snares which entrapped them. They know the perils arising from assorting with a world, where youth find so many things to allure; where good inclinations, a generous heart, and a kind disposition will furnish the very means of ruin. Society, youth must and will have. Good society is difficult to attain and preserve. Evil society is as common as the air, as universal as sin. We speak here of such company as we ourselves *choose*. For we are frequently forced into bad company. In our connections in life, we may be obliged to deal with many, whose principles and practices are totally abhorrent from our own. The dislike and disapprobation of their manners, which we feel, may rather serve to improve our own, and confirm us in our virtues. Peril

lies in the company of such as we voluntarily choose as the associates of our leisure hours; with whom we delight to be, and who assimilate us to their own standard of folly and wickedness.

To imitate is a principle of human nature. It begins with the babe. The boy acts as his father does. The girl repeats the mother. Our native tongue is acquired by imitation. The youth selects a townsman or countryman whom he admires, and makes him his model. Most men form their opinions and manners from the opinions and manners of others. Herein lies the power of the daily journal. And what we approve in social life we imitate. It cannot therefore be supposed that we are divested of this common principle of our nature, in respect to things vicious and immoral. The power of imitation prevails there.

Every man of prudence acts on this principle. The father who has the good of his children at heart, will not rent a house in a bad neighbourhood; because he fears the consequence of a bad example continually before his family. And this is right. But must we not see that exposure to sin anywhere and at any time is *liability to imitate*? There is an *unconscious* imbibing of evil. You remain in a sick-room, and your lungs inhale the fetid atmosphere, it taints your blood, and spreads its poison through your whole system; and *then* you are ready for the disease itself, or some other which may be prevailing. In like manner does bad company in-

fect all within its reach. You look on, half amused, and half ashamed that you should be among them ; all the while quieting conscience with the assurance that you will not participate. You are inhaling the poison of that atmosphere of sin. Continue to be present in such assemblies, listen to their lewd jests, smile when they laugh, depart only when a forced self-respect will not allow you to remain—and in all this, you are crowding your soul full of this infection. The heart is fast becoming corrupted by all this foulness. And in some unguarded moment, in an extreme pressure of temptation, the malady will break out, and *you* will become a participant—a wicked one.

Insensibly, but *surely* we contract the habits of those around us, and with whom we mingle. If they are rude, we become rude. If they are refined and chaste, we are also. “Tell me with whom you go,” says the old proverb, “and I will tell you what you are.”

“Vice is a monster of such frightful mien,  
As to be hated, needs but to be seen.  
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.”

Augustine tells of a Roman youth who could not be induced to attend the theatre, there to witness the brutal fights of the gladiators. He was often rallied about it by his companions, but to no purpose. They could not move him. One day, in

( sport, he was seized by those companions, and carried forcibly to the theatre, where a contest was going on. At first he shut his eyes, refusing to behold the sickening spectacle. Soon he opened them for a moment, and then for a longer space of time ; until at length he looked steadily ; and seeing all the spectators deeply interested, he too became fascinated with the show. Then and there he acquired a taste for such brutal scenes, and became a constant attendant, until, by divine grace, his heart was renewed.

The fatal consequences of bad company have been known, and confessed in all ages. " Evil communications corrupt good manners," said Paul. This is taken from a very ancient heathen poet—Menander ; and seems to have been one of those sentiments which had gained universal assent. Sin and bad company go together. It is dull work to sin alone. Man needs the encouragement of accomplices in his guilt. The sot takes no pleasure in drinking in his own room. He likes to go to a tavern. The more the merrier, is the rule in the assemblies of the wicked.

Men learn their first lessons in evil when among wicked companions. It is seldom a man goes astray without an example which he imitates. A lad hears profanity, and he repeats it. He is invited to drink with tipplers, and does so, and soon a taste for rum is formed. He sees others gaming, and he tries it himself. It is true that men are naturally inclined



to evil. And hence they become apt learners in the school of sin. But it is with bad company as with schooling, we learn *more quickly and thoroughly*. The hardened embolden the hesitating; the adept instructs the beginner. Bad company trains in evil. It shows how it may be done. It calls out the evil which is dormant in every heart. It is a hot-bed, which prematurely developes seeds of sin, which otherwise might never have germinated. Many a hesitating youth, in whose heart yet lingered the monitions of conscience, goaded by the taunts of his companions, has rapidly advanced from the most reluctant rioter, to be the ringleader in all evil deeds. Many a repenting prodigal has been amazed, as he reviewed his life, at the wickedness which bad associates produced in him, and which he never imagined to be there.

Mr. Gough, in a lecture before the Young Men's Christian Association of London, in dwelling on the corrupting influences of bad associates, alluded to the inevitable penalty of mental suffering which every transgressor incurs.

"What you learn from bad habits and in bad society," said he, "you will never forget, and it will be a lasting pang to you. I tell you in all sincerity, not as in the excitement of a speech, but as I would confess and have confessed before God, I would give my right hand to-night if *I could forget* that which I have learned in evil society; if I could tear from my remembrance the scenes which I have witnessed,

the transactions which have taken place before me. You cannot, I believe, take away the effect of a single impure thought that has lodged and harboured in the heart. You may pray against it, and by God's grace you may conquer it, but it will, through life, cause you bitterness and anguish."

*Bad company neutralizes all good influences.* No amount of refinement and education will protect against this invariable rule of human nature. The heavier mass attracts the lighter. So was it in the family of Lot. *His soul* was vexed with the evils of Sodom; but he was tainted with their depravity. Sin, heinous to others, was allowable to him. And in the shame of his own family, he saw that godly parents cannot keep out the bad example of the neighbourhood. You may go to church on the Sabbath, but if on Monday you visit the haunts of evil, the blessed influence of the house of God will disappear. The young man may have a pious father and mother, and may kneel down with them at the family altar; but if he wilfully stands in the way of sinners, or sits in the seat of the scornful, this piety of home will weigh not a feather amid evil associates. All religious instruction is overborne by the lessons of bad company. Prince Eugene, of Soissons, had all those qualifications and endowments which can procure love and esteem. A sweetness of temper, a quick understanding, an heroic ardour, a skill in the sciences and other parts of polite literature, united to justify the exalted

hopes conceived of him. He showed a strong inclination to a military life, and at an early age incurred himself to its hardships, by making a board serve for his pillow. The king, his father, had taken the greatest care of his education. To keep him out of the way of public diversions and other dissipations, he resided at a distance from court: there he gave himself up to the study of the sciences, with such intenseness and application, that he came to the court scarcely once a week. The young prince allowed himself no other amusements, but such as improve as well as divert the mind. How great things then might be expected from him! Alas! all proved vain in the end. Bad companions insinuated themselves into his good esteem. Bad examples found him unable to withstand them. When the vicious were his companions, their manners were no longer his abhorrence. By associating with them, he soon became as abandoned as the worst of them. And in a few years, having lost his virtue, he lost his life. There cannot be a more melancholy proof of the fatal influence which bad company and bad examples have over even the best cultivated and best disposed minds. How then can others expect to avoid the contagion, if they are bold enough to venture into the midst of it? In some persons evil propensities are very strong. It requires much self-restraint, that they may walk in the paths of virtue. For such *it is ruin to venture among evil companions. They must give them up*

*or die.* It may be like plucking out the right eye, but it must be done or the whole body will go to hell. One such came under my observation. He had a violent temper, and an almost quenchless thirst for ardent spirits. At one time he became, as he thought, and as I hoped, a subject of divine grace. His repentance seemed deep, overwhelming, and genuine. He abandoned his evil ways, forsook his former associates, was a constant worshipper in the sanctuary, at the weekly lecture, and the prayer-meeting. And thus he continued for more than a year. But thrown unexpectedly among a few old friends, he was afraid to offend them by not drinking with them: imagining that, unless he did, it would be proof he was not glad to see them. What a cunning device of Satan this is! And how ridiculous! He drank only beer; but it aroused the demon, which had slept for a time, and he fell into his old habits. He was reclaimed, but wicked companions drew him away again and again.

Such cases might be repeated by the hour. And all go to show, that the only safe course is to keep away from evil. Pass not by it. Go on the other side. How is this to be done?

*Avoid those kinds of business which lead to Sabbath-breaking, dishonesty, trickery, double-dealing; and which call together the irreligious, the profane, the gambler, and the tippler.* A man may be in such a business, and become convinced of its evils; and yet he cannot get out of it. He ought as soon as

possible. No considerations of gain ought to prevent him. But there is no excuse for the young man. All kinds of occupations, and all branches of industry are open to him. Why then should he put himself where temptations abound? *I do most earnestly beseech every young man, never to be connected with any store where ardent spirits are sold, or where gambling is carried on.* Sooner go in rags and die of starvation. For to starvation and rags, with a sullied soul, such a place will bring you. No matter how tempting is the offer, or how large is the gain. Shun such an employment as you would the mouth of hell. I would sooner put a son into a pest-house to learn disease, than into a dram-shop to learn business. I have seen—and who has not?—an uncorrupted youth find employment where his masters were men of the world. The Sabbaths have been partly spent in the store, with front windows closed. Cards have been shuffled, casks have been tapped. At first he is uneasy in this new life, but his employers do it, and he regards them as all right. He discovers, too, that they, in spite of their habits, stand well in the community. Even religious men patronize them and court their influence. What marvel, that the youth ceases to restrain the evil propensities of his heart, which clamour for indulgence; and becomes as bad as his associates? Oh how careful should parents be with whom they put their sons to learn trades, or be clerks!

To avoid the snares of bad company, *seek out good*

*company.* All society is not bad. Society the young must have. I would not seclude you from the world, only shelter you from the bad. All the enjoyments of society are not with the bad. And so conduct yourself as to secure and retain the confidence of the virtuous and good, and they will be your firm friends. They will be the friends of your adversity. It is untrue that there is more *heart* among the bad, than with the good. What heart there is with the wicked is hollow-heartedness. While you can be of benefit to them, they are yours; when not, they will forsake you with as little compunction as the ostrich does her nest. Many have experienced this. The prodigal did. Of all those who enjoyed his convivialities, not one came to him in his penury. They did not care that *he* fed swine. Besides this general companying with the virtuous, endeavour to cultivate a friendship with one or more of similar disposition, and similar good intentions with yourself. Cicero remarks upon the benefits which young men find from proper friendships, "they keep them in their duty." A virtuous friend will keep us *steadfast in our duty*—a most valuable service. Away from home, the young man needs those who will take the father's place, and give counsel, and who in the mother's stead will manifest that tender interest in his welfare, which makes him ever ready to heed advice.

Need I tell you that among Christians you will find your best friends? In the sanctuary, in the

Sabbath-school, in the prayer-meeting, you are in good company. Are you a stranger? let the people of God see your face, and they will become interested in you. Call upon the pastor, and if he be of the spirit of his Master, as he should be, he will give you the friendly hand. The best friends you can make in a strange land are Christians.

“While the religion of Christ has its due influence on your souls; while you direct your thoughts, and guide your actions by the precepts of the gospel; you will have that virtue and conscience, which will render vice odious, and goodness alone pleasing. Show yourselves firm, dare but to be singular a while, confront the scoffs and ridicule of despicable sneerers, and they will leave you, because your company will be undesirable to them. Finding you like a rock amid the waves, they will grant you the silent and involuntary approbation of their hearts. Thus you will have true contentment and inward peace. You will procure the honour and esteem of your fellow-creatures and the future rewards of the pious in heaven.”\* “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.”

I cannot help thinking that the reputable members of society, and especially Christians, incur no small share of the responsibility for the existence of demoralizing and vicious examples in the community. If a persistent but kind disapproval of

their course were maintained, the ungodly would be checked in their career. Can we expect anything else than a laxity of moral principles, when Christian men tacitly countenance the ungodly? When they will have close transactions with them for money's sake, so close as to become identified with them? When for the sake of political ends, associations the most unseemly are formed, like the ox and the ass ploughing together? When good men do not speak nor act as though they thought evil was evil, or the wrong doer to be shunned? What inference must the world draw, when a professing Christian will publicly declare that we do not want men of too great purity in high station? When a clergyman of a church of our Lord makes a speech to prove that we have nothing to do with the morals of a Congressman, but only with his political sentiments? When Christian men go deliberately to the polls, and vote for the vicious, against the virtuous? Is it a matter of surprise that our young men, wavering between a life of godliness and of wickedness, should be strongly urged to self-indulgence, when such an endorsement is put on sin?

The Bible does not bid us exclude the bad from our sympathy, care, or attention. "Honour all men." There is a respect due to every man, just because he is a man. But Scripture does plainly, sternly, forbid intimate, voluntary, association with the wicked. The worse a man is, and the more openly he sets at defiance the principles of our holy religion, the greater



is the danger of connection with him, and of conferring honour upon him.

And there is a shameful neglect of the young stranger. A young man comes to a town; who cares to invite him to church, or to a social circle? The saloon is open to him, but what Christian voice inquires of his welfare? If he seeks you, he is regarded; if not, what care you? It is a misfortune that too great a reserve prevails among the moral and upright. The bad open their arms to every stranger. There is a frankness, a cheeriness, a heartiness, a warm welcome in bad company, which is very winning to the new comer. It gains on his affections, and draws him towards them, while the good eye him for a while to see what he *is going to be*. If he turns out well, they will welcome him; if not, they avoid him. Why not try to save him from the clutch of these emissaries of the devil? If he be inclined to go astray, gently draw him to virtuous ways, and thus save a soul from death. Let not Satan have it all his own way. While his minions lurk at every corner, and say, "O come with us, come with us!" cannot Christians say, "Come *with us*, and we will do you good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel?" Thou *art* thy brother's keeper. "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."

## CHAPTER V.

## RUINOUS LIVING.

\*\*\* *“And there wasted his substance with riotous living.”*

THE younger son probably began his spendthrift course, by parting with his possession at a sacrifice. And with the money in his pocket, he departs to a “far country.” That same wicked heart which constrained him to leave home, draws him into a course of prodigality and sin.

This was to be expected. For the heart is a self-generator of wickedness. You can drain the clouds of their rain: you can exhaust the moisture of the marsh by long-continued drought: you can run rivers dry: but you cannot drain out the wickedness of man’s heart. It may pour itself out in vile actions and words, in one constant stream; yet as full as ever will that heart be; undiminished will be its desires for evil.

Hence, when a man enters on a sinful path, he *cannot tell where it will lead him*. When the younger son left home, he had no intention of going to such lengths as he was finally led to. Bad associates

drew him on. He looked around on the debauchery which met his eyes in the haunts of sin, and loathed it in his soul. He was resolved never to sink so low as *that*; but he did. And so many a young sinner pities the poor sot whose bloated form disgusts his eyes. And as that youth, conscious now of his self-restraint, merrily drains the wine-cup, he turns with contempt from the miserable drunkard, who gulps down the vilest rum. And yet in that degradation he is witnessing his own end, as surely as he continues his wayward life. To be assured of this, he need only look back to the days of his purity under his father's roof. How he then shuddered, as he saw others doing precisely what he is now engaged in! A young man swearing, smoking, and drinking in the tavern, was as sad a spectacle to him, as is now the tattered and reeling sot. As surely as the wickedness of his heart, unchecked, took him from his home, drew him away from the principles which a father inculcated, and a mother, with tears, pressed upon him; just as certainly will that wicked heart, uncurbed, drag him down to a profligate's grave.

Every one can call to mind sad repetitions of this younger son's career. The narrowest sweep of memory will embrace more than one. Setting out in life with the fairest prospects, their sun has gone down in a fearful storm. Blessed with talents, education, influence, and friends, they have dragged out a miserable existence. They have literally *wasted*

*their substance.* The portion which God gave them has been squandered. If it were money, infinitely better had they cast it into the ocean, and thus deprived themselves of the means of indulgence. If it were talent, far better to have been half-witted. If it were education, better to have remained in ignorance. For a dreadful retribution awaits those who squander God's gifts.

If God has placed any of my readers in a favoured position, let them beware not to waste the gift. If you are situated where industry, morality, and piety would advance you to honour and influence; do not by idleness and the pleasures of youth, cast away this opportunity. It is far nobler to gird yourself for the contest of life, and be a brave champion for the holy and the good, than to supinely rot in self-indulgence. Self-indulgence can only bring an aching and diseased body, and an untimely grave; while virtue and self-denial bring their own reward.

Every thoughtful person has watched and lamented the *ruinous living*, which the habits of the age, and the notions of personal indulgence have produced. There has been a wide departure in all the land from the moderation of our forefathers. Our cities have become the scenes of ruinous living, if not riotous. Every nerve is strained to keep up appearances. The ambition of multitudes is to be like their neighbours, or to surpass them. Young people seek to begin life, where their parents close it. Men earn money only to

waste it. A bridal dress often costs as much as the whole outfit of our grandmothers. And to dress a child is as expensive, as twenty years ago it was to clothe a man. The worst of foreign manners have been aped. Our old republican and puritan simplicity has yielded to Paris life. Polite society in our cities sneers at our time-honoured notions of propriety. The husband and wife must be divorced, outside of their own doors. He escorts to places of amusement his neighbour's wife or daughter; and a corresponding liberty is granted to his own wife. We find men so immersed in business, that they leave their households to the care of whom it may concern. And the mother commits her tender babes to the care of the uncouth Bridget, misnamed a nurse; while she promenades the streets, or spends the late hours of night at the opera.

In multitudes of families, the all-important duty of home training is neglected; and home-culture, and home-comforts are unknown. The father's place and the mother's is at home. *There* they should seek their happiness. Each other's society should be dearer to them than all the giddy pleasures of merry-makings. And yet often do we witness an abandonment of the home by the husband, who spends his evenings abroad seeking pleasure, while the patient wife sits solitary, encumbered with all domestic care. This is ungenerous. It is in spirit a violation of the solemn marriage-vows. It must end in jealousies and heart-burnings, if it do not

break out into crimination and recrimination. Why should the husband habitually absent himself in the evening any more than the wife, when business does not require it? And yet we can plainly see that the home would be destroyed, if the wife were always away. Happy would it be for our country and our children, if we would return to the home-life of olden times. It were a pity and a sad disgrace to mar this noble Saxon heritage of home; and hand it down to coming generations tainted with French manners or Italian freedom. It is not in the wigwam of the Indian, nor the harem of the Turk, nor the tent of the Arab, nor the aoul of the Tartar, that you find *home*; but only in the family of the Saxon race.

This riotous living has its pleasures. It appeals to our depraved natures. It is just what the unrenewed heart fancies. The paradise of Mahomet is the heaven which suits man. Amid all this giddiness and pleasure, the remonstrances of reason and conscience are stifled. For thus, in the quaintness of Quarles, the riotous liver soliloquizes: "Tell me no more of fasting, prayer, and death, they fill my thoughts with dumps of melancholy. These are no subjects for a youthful ear; no contemplations for an active soul. Let them whom sullen age has weaned from airy pleasures, whom wayward fortune hath condemned to sighs and groans, whom sad diseases have beslaved to drugs and diets; let them consume the remnant of their wretched days

in dull devotion ; let them afflict their aching souls with the untunable discourses of mortality ; let them contemplate on evil days, and read sharp lectures of their experience. For me, my bones are full of unctuous marrow, and my blood of sprightly youth. My strength of constitution hath power to grapple with sorrow, sickness, nay the very pangs of death, and overcome. 'Tis true, God must be sought ; what impious tongue dare be so basely bold as to contradict so known a truth ?—and by repentance too ; what strange impiety dare deny it ? But there is a time for all things. If my unseasonable heart should seek Him now, the work would be too serious for so green a seeker. My thoughts are yet unsettled, my fancy yet too gamesome, my judgment yet unsound. What is once to be done, is long to be deliberated. Let the boiling pleasures of the rebellious flesh evaporate a little, and let me drain my boggy soul from those corrupted inbred humours of collapsed nature ; and when the tender blossom of my youthful vanity shall begin to fade, solid judgment will begin to ripen, my rightly guided will shall be resolved. Till then, my youth will be disturbed with every flash of pleasure, misled by counsel, turned back with fear, puzzled with doubt, interrupted by passion.”\* Thus you reason. But remember “whom thou hast lost by too long delay, thou mayest not find with too late a diligence.”—*You may not find God at the journey's end.*

\* Quarles' Judgment and Mercy—The Procrastinator.

But there may be ruinous living which shall not go to the extreme of a noisy, vicious life. The word which describes the prodigal's course, and is translated *riotous*, means living unsavingly, destructively; living with no thought or care of one's security, with no desire but for present enjoyment.\* This takes in a wider reach than the other, and intimates far less of open disgrace. May not a multitude of reputable, moral men be included in this kind of living?

That is ruinous living, which is a life *without a practical remembrance of God*. It is a trite remark that practical atheism is fearfully prevalent. Many a moral, honest, industrious man, who attends church, and reads his Bible on Sunday, is an atheist. He may shudder at the charge, but his conduct proves it true. He does not act with reference to his Maker's will. He goes and comes, he buys and sells, he plans and accomplishes, without one thought of the duties which God requires of him. In all but the mere belief in the existence of the Deity, and some vague notions of his word, and an acceptance of Christianity as the true religion, he is atheistical. He does not regard God as a being to be worshipped and loved. As the prodigal acted without one thought of the father from whom he had received his portion; so do men conduct their business with no regard to the God who made and preserves them. "We may turn from open vice,

\* Dr. Tyng.



and come among the amiabilities, the noblenesses, the stern and lofty virtues of our social life. And amid these we discover the same forgetfulness of God. This amiability and virtue exist independently of God. It seeks no guidance from him; it asks no strength from him. It is self-sufficient, self-acting. That amiability loves everything but God. That self-devotion, so ready to sacrifice itself to others' welfare, never surrenders one gratification for the sake of God. That indomitable energy, which effects so many deeds of benevolence, never wrought one work for God, solely because it was for God. That enduring patience, which faints at no toil for others, has shrunk from the labour of praising and adoring God."\* That love which can watch over the sufferer patiently through the long hours of night, cannot watch even one hour with the Lord. The noble affections of the heart are bestowed on art, on nature, on books, on friends, but *not on God*. This is the ruinous living of thousands. It may shock them to be told that this is ruinous; for it seems lovely, pure, and of good report. Do we carp at that living? No! Not at what they do, but at what they lack. They lack God enthroned in the heart. It is not a temple in which he dwells.

Among multitudes there is no positive crime, but there is a life without a thought of the world to come. It is a mere rushing on in the headlong pursuit of earthly objects. Each day absorbs the

\* W. Archer Butler's Sermons.

mind by its business or its cares. Even the holy Sabbath does not stay the current of worldliness. Sickness scarcely impresses the mind with seriousness. From the death-bed they rush to the plough, the counter, or the desk. There may be a ruin of the soul in the mere devotion of its powers to earthly and lawful pursuits; just as complete as though it were wedded to the grossest vice. Men may be diligently applying themselves to their calling in life, and be securing well-merited fame. They may be rising in the esteem of every one but God. They may be making their mark, but it is only on tablets of clay—their names are not in the Lamb's book of life. They are laying up treasures here for loved ones, but are securing no glorious and eternal reunions in the kingdom of heaven. However praiseworthy all this care for earthly matters, it is ruinous living for the soul. For thought is devoted to all else, but the true interests of the immortal soul. While correct views are entertained on morals and manners, and on public and social questions, there seems to hang over the soul a cloud or a mist, through which only dimly comes the light of heaven. God is in the firmament of that soul; but he is there as the sun in a foggy atmosphere. The soul sees his disc, and can define his position; but there is no warmth in his rays to remove the chills and damps of earth, which surround and infuse that soul. It does not *live* by the faith of the Son of God. Careless living for the soul is ruinous living for eternity.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR IS HARD.

*And when he had spent ALL, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him.*

God has linked together cause and effect, and no man can separate them. You throw a stone into the air, and it will fall to the earth. You cannot prevent it, any more than you can arrest the sun in the heavens. You put wax in the sun, and it melts, you cannot make the sun harden it. Oil added to the flames increases the fire; you cannot diminish the fire while oil is thrown in. *And God has affixed to a sinful course of life, a bitter end; and no man who pursues that sinful career can escape that bitter end.* God has appointed as a rule in the moral world, that profligacy and sin shall result in ruin; and we can no more break the connection between sin and

ruin, than we can break that force which draws a stone to the earth.

✂ Because God separates cause and effect in the moral world by an interval, we fail to be impressed with its indissoluble connection; "because sentence ✂ against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." If every profligate ran speedily on to destruction, we would stand aghast. But it often takes years to descend from the father's house to the hog-sty. If the first crime committed in secret was immediately followed by the consequences which close up a course of sinful indulgence, we would see the connection more clearly than we do. When the admonition rings in the ear, the answer comes in the heart,—"I have often done so, and not yet have I suffered." And yet God has said, and all experience confirms it—"The way of the transgressor is hard."

This is applicable not alone to *this* world, but to *transgressors everywhere in the universe*. God governs this world upon the same principles which apply to all created beings. "*Without law, or altogether above law, man can never be, for the law is the expression of the divine essence itself.*"\* To the extent of our knowledge, the laws in relation to sin were the same among angelic beings, as with the human race. For when Satan and his host sinned, ✂ they found that the way of the transgressor was

\* Olshausen.

hard. Hurlled from their own habitation, "and reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day," they have learned, as has every other transgressor, that "it is an evil thing and bitter to sin against the Lord."

And the father of transgression among men, who opened the drama of sin upon earth, became the first illustration that the law of heaven was the law of this world. Adam was a sinner and his way was hard. We can faintly conceive of the hardships which our parents endured, thrust out from that blissful Paradise, and compelled to toil in sweat and pain. For the work, which in Eden was a source of pleasure, became, after the fall, a source of distress. At one of the corners of the great thoroughfares of New York City, in the winter of 1862, stood a man behind a small table, upon which were exposed for sale different kinds of eye-glasses. A gentleman who had lost his along the street, stopped to purchase, when the following was narrated:—

"Sir, I have been here only a short time. I formerly lived in Charleston, S. C., and was in good circumstances. But myself and family were compelled to flee, in order to save our lives. We barely succeeded in getting on a vessel about sailing for this city, and secreting ourselves in the hold. We had no time to save anything, not even money enough to pay our passage. We landed here without a cent. We could not pay rent, but we have found a cellar up town that we get for nothing; and

my wife and I make enough to keep us in food and clothing." Was it not hard to go from a comfortable home to live in a *cellar*? And so was it hard for Adam and Eve to live anywhere but in Eden. It was hard for this man to stand in the cold and slush of January and peddle eye-glasses. And it was hard for Adam to sweat among thorns and thistles. Oh how often, during the hundreds of years he lived after his expulsion, must he have thought of the loveliness of that sacred home; and of the happy days spent there! Add to this the sorrow he reaped in his children. Abel was slain by his own brother: and all the scenes of bloodshed and violence which were ever coming to his ears, were like dagger-strokes in his heart. For *he* was the cause of it all. Surely the way of *that* transgressor was hard!

The course run by the younger son is briefly stated, though it may have occupied years. Leaving his father's house, he hasted into a far country, and joined himself to the ungodly, and his riotous living brought him to penury and degradation. Like many a thoughtless son who inherits an estate, he imagines there can be no end to his thousands. He is prodigal, instead of making judicious outlays. He goes into bad company, where money will be drawn from him faster than it can be made. He becomes a high liver, a riotous liver. No fortune, however large, can endure such drains. Unexpectedly, and almost without warning, he finds him-

self penniless. And now evils accumulate. For hard times come on—"and a mighty famine arose." He was so unaccustomed to business; and dissipation had so incapacitated him for respectable employment; that to get his living, he had to descend to the most degrading service a Jew could perform—to feed swine. But even to this depth of shame his evil habits pursue him. By luxurious living his digestive organs were deranged, so that an unhealthy appetite tormented him. And to stop its cravings, he crammed his stomach with the husks which the swine did eat. These husks were not the pods of other fruit—not, for instance, like our corn-husks. They were the fruit of the carob tree. It is often called St. John's bread, from the tradition that the Baptist fed on it when in the wilderness. Sold at a very low price, being exceedingly abundant, it is sometimes eaten by the poorer people: although it is mainly used for feeding domestic animals. The carob is common in Spain, and still more so on the northern coast of Africa, and in the Levant. It is somewhat like a bean-pod in shape, but more in the form of a sickle. The shell or pod alone is eaten. It has a dull sweet taste. The fruit within is bitter, and is cast aside.

This whole description is striking, and for the evident relation in which his punishment stands to his sins. "He who as a son would not be treated liberally by his father, is compelled to be the servant of a foreign master. He who would not be ruled

by God serves the devil. He who would not abide in his father's house is sent to the field among swine. He who would not dwell among brethren and princes, is obliged to be the servant and companion of brutes. He who would not feed on the bread of angels, petitions in his hunger for the husks of swine."\* Was not the way of this transgressor hard?

We have within the compass of this brief narrative, the way of every transgressor. The parts of his career are brought closely together. We see at a glance, what may be traced out in a lifetime.

The way of the transgressor is hard *because it ruins health*. Without health man's days are miserable. We should do all we can to preserve a sound body. If we would have the future days of our life exempt from disease and painful maladies, which will be like rottenness in the bones; we must follow Paul's advice to Timothy—"Flee youthful lusts." Early indulgences in eating and drinking, or any other kind of dissipation, will lay the foundation of physical distress. The young man given to late hours, and late suppers, to wine and cigars, will lose the bloom of youth; and premature wrinkles and sallowness will overspread his face—unless the redness of dissipation hides it. Visit the various sanitary establishments of the land, and you find in them numbers of broken down young men and women; and those scarcely in the prime

\* Trench on Parables.



of life. Thus robbing themselves of the pleasures of life, which might long have been enjoyed; they learn that the way of the transgressor is hard. Do not forget that *piety*, *morality*, and *industry* lead to *happiness*, *longevity*, and *health*.

The way of the transgressor is hard, because it *brings to poverty*. Poverty is not disgraceful in itself. Nor are the poor always unhappy. Often there is more real comfort in the cottage than in the palace. That sweet story of the Shepherd of Salisbury Plains shows us this. But those who become *poor* through their own prodigality are the *most wretched poor*. They are irrecoverably indolent, helpless, untidy, and wasteful. It seems as though they can never get out of their thriftless habits. The remembrance of better days is always a dark cloud on their minds. Hence, when we say, that a life of self-indulgence brings to poverty, we assert that it is a *positive evil*. And whether one has a fortune to spend, or lays out each dollar as he can get it, the result will be the same—*poverty*. A Mr. Roggleton recently died in London, who, in ten years, literally ate up a fortune of \$750,000. This singular person traversed all Europe for the sake of gratifying his appetite. In 1849 he stole away the cook of Prince Potemkin, in Russia. He had agents in China, Mexico, and Canada to supply him with the rarest delicacies. A single dish sometimes cost him \$250. What was the end of such extreme folly? On the 13th of April nothing was left him but a

solitary guinea, a shirt and battered hat, and the other clothes on him. With the guinea he bought a woodcock, which he had served up in the highest style of culinary art. He gave himself two hours of rest for an easy digestion, and then jumped into the Thames from Westminster Bridge, and was drowned. He died as a fool dieth.

The way of the transgressor is hard, because *it leads to excess*. No delusion is greater than that we can stop when we please in a career of self-indulgence. A stone does not stop sinking in the water until it reaches the bottom. And when a man begins to go down the hill of sinful practices, he seldom pauses until, like the prodigal, he mires with the swine. A lad who steals and is sent to the penitentiary, generally steals again when he comes out. "One evil invites another ; and when God is angry and withdraws his grace, and the Holy Spirit is grieved and departs from his dwelling, the man is left at the mercy of the merciless enemy, and he shall receive him only with variety of mischiefs : like Hercules, when he had broken the horn of Achelous, he was almost drowned with the flood which sprang from it ; and the evil man, when he hath passed the first scene of his sorrows, shall be enticed or let fall into another."\*

If my reader has a limit to his indulgence beyond which he will not go, and at which he will halt, let me say, that he will not stop at that point ; for he

\* Jeremy Taylor—Apples of Sodom.

will be carried far on by the momentum of sin. Then he will have no disposition to turn. Sin will be too sweet. He will be the slave of sin. Satan is very willing to accept us for a few years, because he knows that he will probably have us for ever.

The prodigal's course is wretched, because *its pleasures soon pass away*. The pleasures of sin, like the husks, *fill but never satisfy*. For a time the soul is intoxicated by them. Life is a round of gaiety, and glee. Nothing disturbs. Conscience is asleep. The powers of indulgence are fresh. But the course of sensual pleasure is soon run. The pleasure which the man had in these indulgences, is no longer afforded him. He hankers after them with a brutish instinct. Like the prodigal, he must have something, if it be only husks. The debauchee comes down from his wines and delicacies, to the vilest rum, and the cold victuals of charity. "What Pliny said of the poppies growing in the river Caius, 'it brings a stone instead of a flower or fruit;' so are the pleasures of these pretending sins; the flower at the best is stinking, but there is a stone in the bottom; it is gravel in the teeth, and a man must drink the blood of his own gums when he manducates such unwholesome, such unpleasant fruit. It is a great labour and travail to live a vicious life."\* A few riotous nights suffice to work the decay of years. Bad habits are formed, which cannot be cast off. The body is drained of life by

\* Jeremy Taylor.

excess. The mind is darkened and obscured, the temper capricious, the affections blunted, hope faded out, self-respect gone. Oh what a fearful price to pay for those few days of sensual pleasure!

This issue is sure to come. It may not always be immediate. There may be a period of gratification and delight in transgression, long continued, when the eye is not tired of seeing nor the appetites glutted with indulgence. The summer and the winter both pass in their turns. The morning cometh, and also the night. But, sooner or later, the glare of enjoyment is shut out by returning clouds of conscious distress, and the day of mirth sinks into the darkness of despair.\*

How truthful an illustration of all this waning of the pleasures of sin is presented in Byron, who,—with everything that fortune, rank, and genius, could give him; but who laid out his whole life for self-indulgence, and not for duty and noble deeds—exclaimed, before he had reached half the allotted period of man,

My days are in the yellow leaf,  
The flowers, the fruits of love are gone.  
The worm, the canker, and the grief,  
Are mine alone!

What are these deeply affecting lines but the confession of one, who, having spent all, found himself in spiritual want! And the prodigal's misery,

\* Dr. Tyng.

and sense of the barrenness of sin, find a yet deeper wail in this same poet :

The fire that on my bosom preys,  
Is lone as some volcanic isle ;  
No torch is lighted at its blaze,  
A funeral pile.

One of the most awful consequences of sin is REMORSE. Beneath its terrific blows the haughtiest and most hardened wretch has wailed piteously. Like a demon it haunts the transgressor everywhere. If no other punishment were inflicted in this life, the way of the transgressor would indeed be hard. A time comes when the victims of the licentious can no longer be banished from the mind. Memory keeps them there. They seem to rise from the grave, or come out from dens of infamy, and stare the seducer in the face. Their reproaches ever tingle in the ear. The rest of night is disturbed by them. Keep them away ! keep them away ! breaks out in his fitful slumbers ; and betrayed confidence has its revenge. A clergyman wrote thus of Graves, a noted duellist, who shot Cilley. “ He died the victim to the most horrible of horrors. Two years he passed in sleepless nights, with rooms lighted, and with watching friends, whom he was unwilling to have for a moment leave his presence. He consumed the hours of night in walking to and fro, in frightful starts, in moans, and groans, and tears ; and in wild exclamations. At length, worn

out with mental anguish, and grief unmitigated, and wasting watchfulness, the unhappy man expired."

"There is no peace to the wicked." We need not be debauchees, nor duellists, to experience that. A thousand memories of the past arise to flood with tears the eyes of the sinner, and to pierce his heart with sorrow.

"O pleasures past, what are you now  
But thorns about my bleeding brow?  
Spectres that hover round my brain,  
And mock and aggravate my pain?"

The course of the transgressor *is often short*. Their excesses exhaust life, or cut it off hastily. How often we see a young man digging his own grave by his vices! Frequently the "wicked do not live out half their days." I knew a kind-hearted youth, generous to a fault, who early fell into bad company. At the age of sixteen, he was seen intoxicated. He acquired a taste for ardent spirits. He used profane language. He was licentious. Efforts were made to save him. He was taken into the country, that he might be away from the temptations of the city; but his vicious habits were ever craving indulgence. Three miles from his home was a wretched hovel, where a degraded sot lived by himself. Thither this young man often went, and passed half the night. Early one morning, just before day-break, he set out on his return from the night's debauch. The ground was covered with snow, which had just fallen. He was intoxicated,

and grew cold and weary, and finally sank down in the snow near a farm-house. He was discovered by the inmates, and taken to his own home. His hands and his feet were so frozen that in spite of all efforts they could not be restored to their natural state. Mortification ensued, and amputation became necessary. Both his feet were taken off above the ankles; and nearly all his fingers. This was too great a tax on his enfeebled system. He sank into a decline; and in four months went down into an early grave, at the age of twenty-four. His sun "went down while it was yet day." Though there was hope in his death, still the way of that transgressor was hard.

Before closing this chapter, let us give our thoughts a wider reach. We may be moral and blameless in our deportment. Men may justly esteem us. And yet living prayerless, impenitent, unbelieving, "without God," we are transgressors—transgressors against God, if not against man. And as such our way must be hard. We see that one who violates natural laws is overtaken by its consequences; how can any escape who violate spiritual laws? If abuse of the body brings disease and death, what shall be the effect of abusing the soul? Whatsoever we sow, of temporal things, we reap the same. Does the process cease at the grave? Scripture says it does not. Approach this death-bed, and listen: "I have nothing to expect, sir, but condemnation." The speaker articulated with

difficulty. Struck down suddenly from full health to the bed of death, he made, there and then, agonizing confessions. "There is a demon whispering in my ear, You knew it at the time, and at every time." Knew what? "Why, that a penalty must follow a broken law. Mark me. I have not opened a Bible for twenty years. Yet the very recollection that my mother taught me to pray, (and she died when I was only six years old,) has passed judgment upon all my sins. I have done wrong, knowing that it was wrong; first with a few qualms, then brushing aside conscience, and at last with the coolness of a fiend. Sir, in one minute of all my life, I have not lived for heaven.

"Yes! Christ died for sinners, but I can see almost into eternity. I can feel that unless Christ is desired, sought after, that unless guilt is repented of, his death can do no good. If we sow thorns, you know we cannot reap flowers; and corn don't grow from thistle seed. I have been following up the natural laws, and I see an affinity between *them* and the great laws of God's moral universe. Heaven was made for the holy. There is a distinction—it's all right."

He sunk into a slumber. Presently, aroused by the striking of a clock, he looked around and whispered—"It's awfully dark here. My feet stand on the slippery edge of a great gulf. Oh! for some foundation." He stretched his hand out as if feeling for a way.



“Christ is the only help,” said the man of God. “Not for me. I shall fall—I am falling,” he half shrieked an instant after; he shuddered and all was over.

Let us look a little further, just where our Lord raised the curtain. “The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, (he did not call on God, he dared not,) and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.” Was not the way of that transgressor hard?

## CHAPTER VII.

THE PRODIGAL COMING TO HIMSELF,  
OR CONVICTION OF SIN.

*And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!*

“HITHERTO we have followed the sinner, step by step, in a career which is ever carrying him further and further from God. Another task remains—to trace the steps of his return, from the first beginnings of repentance to his full reinvestment in all the rights and privileges of a son. For though he has forsaken his God, he has not been forsaken by Him.”\*

The younger son had reached the bottom. There he sits among the swine, the most unclean and beastly of beasts—himself fed with what they eat. A man might lie among lions, bears, or wolves, if possible; he might consort with the deer, or the sheep; and yet retain some semblance of decency. But nothing more vile and wretched can be imagined, than to be a companion of that animal, which

\* Trench.

is a synonym for all that is uncouth, disgusting, and bestial. When we wish to express our thorough abhorrence of a man's habits and life, we say, he is a hog.

Behold, ye transgressors, where your path ends! The licentiousness, crimes, and follies of life empty themselves here. *This* is the goal to which they conduct their followers. Few get out of it. More rot in the hog-sty of sin than recover and get out. Here, in the great majority of cases, the curtain drops upon them, and they are seen no more. They stretch their dying limbs upon a cot in the hospital, or are dredged up from the bottom of a river, and unwept they are flung into the Potter's field.

Our Lord presents a picture of man reduced to the greatest extremity and want, and steeped in iniquity. And this is to show, not alone how vile man may become, but also and mainly, how powerful is that grace of the gospel, which can reclaim him. *Reclaim* him not merely to virtue's paths, but to his father's bosom.

The first step in this reclamation is to become *conscious of our situation*. In the expressive language of the parable, the prodigal "came to himself." He had been living out of himself, contrary to his own best interests. He had been like a man in the excitement of battle, or in the phrensy of passion. He did not stop to think, or else he deliberately banished thought. What an awakening, when such an one comes to himself! He sees how

low he has fallen. The crimes or misdeeds which soil his character ; the bright prospects which illuminated his pathway in early life, but which now are displaced by storms, and a dreary waste ; tears shed ; hearts broken ; graves hiding those who mourned his follies ; a wife, a mother who ended bitter days because of his deeds—these which burst from their lurking places in his heart, come forth and sting like vipers. He becomes loathsome in his own eyes, and writhes under the keen sting of self-reproach. Is it a marvel that, goaded by such recollections, he often falls back into his old habits—prefers the sty to all these horrors which meet him on the threshold of reformation? And so the sow *before she* is washed returns to her wallowing in the mire.

But this younger son was saved from such a relapse. He “came to himself,” and saw himself in his *true character*. He had never been duly affected by his base ingratitude in leaving home. Now his treatment of that kind father fills him with the deepest remorse. He has squandered his fortune, he has disgraced himself, but above all, he has been an ungrateful son. In later life, nothing points the arrows of remorse like unkind treatment of our parents. As their love towards us is the strongest ever bestowed on us ; so that love unrequited, abused, causes the most poignant sorrow. It is something we can never get over. Tears of penitence do not wash away its corroding power.

And in the sinner’s heart, who is coming to him-

self, arises this remembrance of *God's slighted love*. He traces, all through his life, indications of the Divine forbearance. He now beholds, as never before, and in amazement, long-suffering, abundance of goodness, and mercy.

"Ten thousand times his goodness seen,  
Ten thousand times his goodness grieved."

He can scarcely credit the retrospect. He inquires, Why was all this to me? Why am I alive, when so many of my contemporaries are in the grave? Why have I been shielded from calamity, which has overwhelmed others? Why have I been prospered, when they were thwarted at every step? And what have I done in return for all this? Can I call those transient emotions I have had *gratitude*? Can the God who has been so indulgent to me be content with those fragments of thought, those shreds of my time, which I have bestowed upon him? Alas! I must confess myself an ungrateful child! And he who is of a noble soul, in all that relates to the amenities and proprieties of life, may well hang his head as he recalls all his forgetfulness of God. Now his true character of heart is revealed. He discovers that all his care has been to have an unsullied record for man to look at; but how tarnished is that which God beholds!

The sinner comes to himself, and finds an *angry God*. This Being is justly offended with him. Men may carp about God's anger as inconsistent with his holiness and love; but the awakened sinner is

never troubled by such doubts. He feels that all his life of thoughtlessness and irreligion could not confront his Maker, without receiving the frowns of that Maker. The more his sins multiply in number, the deeper grows the feeling that God is angry with him. Sometimes he becomes greatly alarmed. He hears the terrible voice of the Judge. He reads his death warrant in the threats of the law. Sin ceases to appear of small consequence. Sin confronts him at every turn, as he reviews his life. He meets it where he never saw it before. His own esteemed works of righteousness are vain. His virtues are of no value. All he is, and all he has done, are so faulty and corrupt, that God must be angry with everything about him. He seems to be in a desert, and whichever way he turns, there, in awful majesty, appears that offended God.

The convicted sinner comes to himself, i. e., he comes *back to himself*. He has been away from himself, *out of himself*. He meant to *live for himself*, but so has Satan deceived him, that he has been living *against himself*, against his own eternal interests. For he only lives for himself, who lives for God. And in coming to himself, the sinner meets a being whom he has never known before. He *awakes to the reality and importance of his own nature, to a consciousness of his immortality.* He experiences, as never before, that he has a soul over which death has no power. This contrast between himself, and the nature of his pursuits, prostrates

him in deep abasement. He regards himself as the child of a prince, and yet rolling in voluntary filth and beggary. Said a talented youth, in these circumstances, "What a poor, degraded thing seems my whole life to me; never before did I seem to have a thought or an object becoming my real character and being."\* Thus changed become his conceptions of life, and of what is most valuable.

The convicted sinner comes to himself and finds where he is. The prodigal found himself a companion of swine. Undoubtedly he was startled when he realized his position. And so the sinner finds himself among God's enemies. Whatever respect he may profess for the Deity, he is not "on the Lord's side." He is a companion of lost spirits, the worst of God's intelligent creatures. He would shrink from associating with the debased, and yet his soul is the dwelling-place of spirits from the pit. They roam at pleasure and tarry at will, in all the chambers of his heart. For the Holy Spirit is not there to keep them out. Life, too, has gone by, and nothing is done as to the great purpose of life—to prepare for death. To-morrow he may be summoned to the grave, and what has he for that to-morrow? What has he to show for all these days? A few dollars, a high reputation—perhaps not even these. What has he that he can take away with him? Will the result of his labours greet him in the next world? Will he be as happy there as

\* Dr. Tyng.

he is here? *Every thing* has been given—his very soul has been staked upon this venture. And what is received in return? Anything imperishable? Anything which can endure the flames which are to try every man's work? Revolving such thoughts, he feels that strength was spent for that which is nought, and labour for that which profiteth not.

By such contemplations as these, the awakened sinner reaches the conclusion of the prodigal—"I perish with hunger." Oh how this cry comes out of thousands of hearts, who know not the cause of their hunger! They are surrounded by comforts, and luxuries; they are prosperous, and healthy; they have friends; and yet their souls are not at ease. All this does not satisfy. There is a void unfilled, a hankering ungratified. They imagine the fault to be in those things about them. And they resort to change, but no relief comes. *In their own heart is the secret of failure.* There was food enough around the prodigal, but it was not what his nature required. So there is a sufficiency around man, but they are not what his spiritual nature craves. It was contrary to nature that the prodigal should cram himself with husks; and it is contrary to man's spiritual nature, to attempt to satisfy the soul by that which pleases the senses. Hence the soul is hungry with all man's pampering to it. It says of mirth, it is mad. Occupation and gain give it no relief. Gain is a miserable substitute for godliness; and yet, how common a substitute it is! Sometimes



insanely man tries to drink away care, attempting to drown it in the intoxicating cup. He dances, but it is in chains. He feasts, but it is in prison. He returns from his bank, his shop, his counter, his office; from riots and indulgences. In all these he is unsatisfied and hungry. Why? The soul does not want these, it craves God. It

Pants to view his glorious face,  
Upward tends to his abode,  
To rest in his embrace.

The late Prince Albert, so beloved in England, said on his deathbed to his physician: "No, I am not afraid; I trust I am prepared for death. I have wealth, and rank, and honour, and I thank God for them; but *if these were all, I should be a miserable man.*" He continually repeated in his short illness that hymn,

Rock of ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.

The soul is never at rest until it is reconciled to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

From all this do not imagine that I believe the world to be a desolate, forlorn spot. We come to thorns and thistles as did our father Adam—by *our own sins*. I have no sympathy with gloomy views of earth. It is much better than we deserve. Much good can be had on it. Our blunders render it far worse than it otherwise would be. "Sin destroyeth much good." And an ungrateful and discontented spirit may extract poison from the fairest

flowers. I protest against this charging upon this earth, that which is the consequence of man's own forgetfulness of God. The way to enjoy the world is not to pervert its blessings, nor to attempt to get from it what can only be obtained from religion,—contentment and *peace of mind*. The fullest enjoyment of this life is only secured *in God and through God*.

As one goes through a round of pleasure, and finds it all vanity, so men often wander from one system of error to another, finding each unsatisfying. Through the dismal swamps of Atheism, Pantheism, and Universal Salvation, and many similar devices of Satan, the soul travels seeking good. But all are vain; they are the heartless mockery of real distress. They aggravate, they cannot alleviate. The soul experiences a want which these have no power to supply. The soul listens to their pompous pretensions, their empty boasts, surveys the whole of what they present; tries them; worries through them, and at last comes back to its unrelieved condition of misery. Or if spared this desolate wandering, the human heart tries various expedients; such as plans of personal amendment, and schemes of individual virtue founded on human resolution and strength. And then one false hope after another is tested. There is a self-righteous confidence, a proud and unbelieving spirit, a holding off from Christ. In all these modes does the convicted sinner perish with hunger.

Thus the Holy Spirit visits the lost one. He knocks at the door of his heart. He opens his eyes so that he sees. He recalls the words of God taught long since by a mother. A forgotten sermon, with its startling admonitions, speaks again from the past. Convicted soul ! follow him ; he will lead you to your God. He will teach your palsied lips to pray. Smitten though you be with blindness ; though you grope about and tremble, lest at any moment you stumble into the pit, put forth your hand and follow him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## R E P E N T A N C E .

*I will arise and go to my father, and I will say unto him : Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son ; make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father.*

IN this most instructive fifteenth chapter of Luke we have a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost man ; all of which are intended to represent different phases of man and God, as related to each other in sin and redemption. Man is like a sheep astray ; like a piece of money which has fallen among rubbish, or rolled out of sight ; like a foolish youth, who leaves his father's house, and, ruled by passion, rushes into a dissolute career, and spends all his wealth and debases mind and body. And now, *how is he to get out of this ?* We are told how the sheep is found ; how the money is recovered ; and also how man is to be reclaimed.

The awakened sinner knows that he is lost. Already he has experienced that it is an evil thing, and bitter to sin against the Lord his God. Misery

in himself, misery around him, misery in prospect, are his portion. In this darkness which overspreads him, one gleam of hope has begun to shine. It is the twinkle of the Star of Bethlehem. Let him follow it, and he shall be brought to the threshold of heaven, and there receive a Father's bounty and love.

But many refuse this "light shining in a dark place." Rather than accept heaven's solution of the most difficult of all questions—how man may be justified before God—they attempt to solve it of themselves. Some betake themselves to moral reformation; and others to benevolent actions. I knew a man who built a church at his own expense; and no doubt he expects the Lord to admit him to heaven on that account, just as did those who cried, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" and yet he has not the love of God in his heart; nor does he profess to follow Christ. If man could *purchase* an entrance into heaven, multitudes of the rich would be adherents of Christ. If, according to Rome, a man could endow an institution, bequeath a part of his fortune to the church; be absolved by a priest, receiving a wafer on his tongue, oil on his ears, and man's breath into his nostrils, how much less would the cross be shunned!

Multitudes of minds are awake on the subject of religion; but never rightly guided, they struggle on in all the energy of despair, gaining nothing and

coming no nearer the true light. You see them in the heathen world, among the Mormons, among the followers of the last deceiver who comes up, drawing his inspiration from the pit. These poor victims are earnest, deeply anxious, willing to do or suffer anything to gain a substantial hope. Yet they persistently, wilfully reject the gospel, which alone is able to make them wise unto salvation. How tenaciously men will cling to errors, and how shrewdly they will defend them !

That part of the prodigal's history presented in this chapter, points out the *only path to heaven*. *It shows just what an awakened sinner must do*. All other ways are side-paths, which terminate in hell. However proper they may seem ; however well recommended ; however plausibly teachers may trace them out on paper, and to you may prove by their lines, that these ways must end in heaven—they are not only hypothetically but *actually* false ; follow them and you go on to certain ruin.

Let us travel along the path which the Prodigal took. *He arose* ; “I will arise.” In this terse description this is not a useless word ; it denotes *action and determination*. He would remain no longer where he was. His purpose was fixed to leave those swine, whether he ever bettered himself.

Such a resolve must come into the returning sinner's heart. He must *arise*. He must *not sit* bemoaning his misery ; sighing over his wretched-

ness. He must not wish himself saved; he must *arise*. He must leave those sins and go to the cross, where alone he can be unburdened. Many stay months and even years in this sty of sin. They see, they confess, their deplorable state; but they will not *arise*. We point them to the cross, but they tell us they cannot get there. We urge them to ask God's help, by prayer, and yet they remain fixed, like the impotent man at Bethesda. The sinner must *arise*. He must quit his sins. If any object be too dear to forsake, then he must remain among the swine; and that sin, or that object which he cannot renounce, is the millstone which will sink him to perdition. The sincere penitent "doth with grief and hatred of his sin *turn from it* unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience." The unwillingness to part from sin is evidence that the heart is not truly convinced. There are cells in it yet unopened by the Holy Spirit. There is a frightfulness in sin which it has not yet experienced. Lot's wife was loath to leave Sodom, and she never did in her heart; and because her heart was in Sodom, her body never reached a place of safety.

"I will arise." Noble resolve! Let Satan hold you no longer! Let the world attract you no more! Let not that deceitful heart detain you! Arise from thy sins; from thy despondency; from thy delay. And whither shall I go? *To the Father*. "I will arise and go to my father," said the Prodigal.

Surely that heart is now touched, subdued, melted. He remembers the father's love, and tenderness, and sympathy. The filial feeling, so long dormant, is now awakened. He will go to the one whom he has injured, despised; and whose authority he spurned.

And we should go to the God whose commands we have set at naught all our lives; to him who is pleased to allow us to call him our Father. Yes! we have a Father and a home. Though we may have wandered long, and sinned grievously, we are not orphans, nor homeless. There is a shelter for our souls. There is a God ready to be reconciled to us through Jesus Christ. And that Father tells us how willing he is to receive us. In this respect, the sinner is more favoured than was the prodigal. He knew not the reception he should meet. He could only *hope* for the best. But the offer of mercy and pardon is made *in advance* to the children of men. Then why not go to God? are not the invitations as *pressing* as language can make them? as *warm* as a Father's love can render them? "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin." Can we not trust in that love, mercy, and pardon, which are pledged in the death of Jesus Christ? The Saviour has paved the way for reconciliation. Every barrier he has removed. An eastern proverb says, "If man draws near to God an inch, God will draw near to him an ell." God sees us afar off. Every *sinner must go to God*; with "grief and



hatred of his sin, he must turn from it *unto God*." Cain and Judas saw their sin; they *grieved* over them, but they never went to God. Judas *hung himself*; Cain *became* a fugitive and a vagabond. David saw *his* sin; he *grieved* over it; he hated it; but he went to his closet, and besought in tears God's forgiveness. Then, start *at once* to this loving Father. It is a decision upon which everything may depend. *Instantly* arise and go; and however helpless you are, God will bestow the power to carry it out. Nothing can be more simple, nothing more effective and real, than the determination and choice, "I will arise *and go to my Father*."

"Often the difficulty in the way hangs upon some *single fact* in life which has been a controlling one—some one remaining hostility in the pride of the heart, which refuses to yield—and in the severing of that, the choice may be made free. I recall to mind a very interesting and attractive young man who sought me once for religious guidance. He had been gay, self-indulgent, and living without God, but he was now awakened and serious, yet hesitating and proud. His wife he described to me as a Christian woman; but he acknowledged himself a neglecter of God's salvation, yet now desiring to find the way of peace. Our conversation occupied a long evening. At last I said, 'Now go home, take your stand for Christ to-night; tell your wife that the time past of your life has been enough for sin, and that you now mean to live for Christ, and

seek the kingdom of God. Kneel down with her, and begin your united prayer to-night. Will you do this?' 'No,' he replied, 'I cannot.' I remonstrated and entreated in vain; he was immovable. I then said to him, 'I have nothing more to say,' and for some minutes we sat in silence. I resumed the book which I had been reading, but presently repeated the question, and was again refused. After some minutes' further delay, he rose from his seat and sighed deeply. I saw the tears starting from his eyes, and I asked the same question again. He replied, 'I will,' and immediately left my house. The next evening I saw this young man coming into our lecture-room with a young woman leaning on his arm, whom I had often marked there before, as a stranger and a woman of a sorrowful spirit. They came to the front seat immediately before me, and kneeled together in silent prayer. At the close of our worship I approached them, and he introduced his wife to me. I told her what he had promised me the night before, and asked, 'Did he do it?' She answered me, 'Yes, he did.' I turned to him and said, 'And how do you feel to-night?' 'Sir,' he exclaimed, 'I am the happiest man in the city of Philadelphia.' For several years this young man walked as a useful, active follower of Christ, highly valued and much beloved. He closed his pilgrimage in a rapid consumption. On one occasion near his death I said to him, 'Do you remember the evening when you first came to my study?'

‘Remember it!’ said he; ‘I shall never forget it throughout eternity. It was the birthday of my soul.’ He raised his feeble hands as he spoke, and clasping them together, covered his face, and burst into tears.”\*

The *third* feature of the prodigal’s return now demands our attention—*his confession of sin*. “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” Most touching words! What thorough humiliation do they evidence! How changed that younger son! Proud spirited, impatient of a most salutary control, with the flush of youth on his cheek, and his bones full of marrow, he went out of that gate. Behold him now, dirty, ragged, the lines of dissipation furrowed on his countenance, and his body a wreck! And yet he is a better man. He is more lovely. There is more hope of him now. For he is better at heart. He *comes home for forgiveness*. He sees his error. Hear him. “I have lost my character of a son, for I have disgraced my father; I have dishonoured my family. Shall it be known that I, in these rags, am his son? How can I maintain the dignity of the house, for I am a beggar? How can I, who have been a companion of swine, sit at my father’s table?”

With such a spirit, the repenting sinner comes to God. He is a son, but a son who has lost the likeness. Can the Father recognize his child, in that

\* Dr. Tyng.

object which draws near him? Shall so sinful a creature be made an inmate of his house? "*I have sinned*," confesses the penitent. Oh what a word that is! How far reaching! How deep down it goes! It is one of those phrases which expresses volumes. You write the history of man's entire earthly course in those three words. "*I have sinned*." It is the heart breaking. It is the heart pouring itself out like water before God. It is the language which every penitent sinner has used from age to age. It has been repeated in all tongues. The penitent cannot set before God the details of his sinfulness. Nor is it required. This one expression is enough. God knows all our sins, far more accurately than we can. He wants the *confession*. He wants that humbled heart from which it comes. Notice that the son says nothing in his justification. He does not begin—"Father, you know that youth is restive, and hankers after forbidden pleasures. I was led away by the power of wealth. Wicked associates, with whom unfortunately I went, enticed me. In a moment of passion I left you." No! Nothing of this sort. But in deep abasement he exclaims, "*I have sinned*." How different this from the attempt of Adam to shift the blame off his own head!

Now this is a vital point in our repentance. There must be no make-shifts with God. We must not attempt to crawl out of some of our sins, by putting them on father Adam. There must be no puling

sentimentalism about the frailty of human nature. There must be no plea that we tried to do the best we could. We may not skulk behind the unfavourable circumstances that surrounded us. We must not even look askant at the sins of Christians. No! none of these must be resorted to. But there must be an honest, hearty, out-spoken, whole-souled confession—*I have sinned*. “A broken and a contrite heart,” God must have.

And now one step more remains. The prodigal *implores pardon*. “Make me as one of thy hired servants.” I am aware that these words are often, perhaps generally, understood to refer to a desire in the prodigal to have his sincerity tested. He wished to serve under his father, that by his faithfulness he might regain paternal confidence. But I shall employ this request in another way—to signify his desire to be received into that family, of which once he was a member. He felt that he could not ask to come in as a son; for he had shown himself unfit to be a son; yet the next highest happiness would be to *serve as a hired man*. For the word does not mean a slave, as in the 22d verse. He desired to be where that father was, to see his face, to hear his voice; even though it should be as a servant. And the burden of the penitent is to have his guilt removed. He craves the blessed words—“Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee.” He longs to see that Father’s face, and enjoy his favour. Oh how the penitent watches for

these tokens ! Day and night he cries out for them. "Oh that I knew that my father had forgiven me!"

Need I guard against a wrong impression? Have I said so much about the sinner's *doing*, that Christ is lost sight of? Then let me state plainly. It is not our penitence, nor anguish, nor confession of sin, nor even the coming to the Father, which obtain pardon. That is secured *only* by the atonement of our Lord and Saviour. We must keep him in view each step we take. Jesus makes us welcome. Jesus has made return possible. And yet *we must arise*, and go to Him.

The prodigal *said*, I will arise and go to my father: and *he went*. But with many, between this saying and the actual *doing*, there is a long standing still: and in the case of numbers, irresolution and a turning back again. Multitudes of the hearers of the gospel are in this state of mind, probably many perish just in this way. They are thoroughly convinced of their personal duty, as presented in the claims and promises of the gospel. But conviction is not conversion. Conviction is a mere knowledge of facts—a knowledge of sin. Its value depends on what it leads to. The enemy may come and remove all these convictions, lead away to sin, overwhelm with delusions, or ensnare in worldliness. To go to God, and be sheltered by him is the only security. The object of conviction of sin, is *the heart's return to God*. Complete submission to him is its end. He requires *instant* obedience. Delay

is chosen disobedience; and more fearful is the punishment. While men wait, new difficulties and objections are started in their minds; the work grows more severe every day. Reader, you will never settle this matter by argument and discussion. There must be decision and action. You must *arise* and go to Christ.

“A young man of wealth and means was occupied in a large commercial office. He had been gay, volatile, and thoughtless. He had never yielded to the temptations of vice, or wandered in the paths of outward immorality. But his youth had passed without religion, and his maturity had opened with no promise of improvement. He was suddenly arrested in his bed with a conviction which seemed to charge him with the guilt of a wasted life, and a course of constant neglect of the God who had made and blessed him. The past of his career was all dissatisfying. The world which he had loved and tried, was a wide-spread famine around him, and ‘he began to be in want.’ The sudden conviction was succeeded by an instant purpose of return to the God whom he had despised. ‘I will waste no more,’ he said within himself, and rose immediately from his bed, and bowed his knees upon the floor in prayer. ‘He arose and went to his Father,’ in an instant action of his own heart and mind. And the conflict was ended. He went on his way rejoicing from that hour. Hardly minutes of mere conviction passed. His heart at once embraced the

remedy. He saw the way of hope, and he laid hold of it.”\*

A Judge of the Supreme Court in one of the sea-board States, was brought in humble penitence to the foot of the cross. He sought to be admitted to the communion of that church where he had been a worshipper. As he entered the consistory room, where the elders of the church were convened to receive applicants for admission to their communion, he exclaimed, “I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son,” and then he burst into tears.

Beautiful words are these! Heaven’s own liturgy in which to confess! None but Jesus our High Priest, our Advocate, could frame so exquisite a *confiteor*. In all time penitents will pour out their hearts in this sublime sentence.

\* Dr. Tyng.



## CHAPTER IX.

## THE PRODIGAL RECEIVED AND WELCOME.

*But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.*

THE confession of this younger son was no shrewd artifice, whereby to melt an obdurate father. It came out of his penitent heart, for he makes his confession *after* the manifestations of a father's tenderness—*after* the embrace and the kiss which denoted reconciliation. Though thus graciously

received, he does not omit the confession—I have sinned—upon which he had determined. Undoubtedly that confession was all the more deep, because of this unexpected forgiveness.

There has been a question raised, whether repentance is the act of the *converted* man or of the *sinner*; whether a man does truly repent until he is converted. This narrative shows the correct view. Repentance *begins* when we are in the far off country, wallowing in our wretchedness; it *increases* as we go on to our Father; and it *attains its perfection* when the kiss of reconciliation is printed on the brow. I say reaches its *perfection*, not its *end*. For repentance is never absent, as an act of the renewed heart. Since the more we know and taste of the love of God, the more we grieve ever to have sinned against that love. So that we may safely say, that the truest and best repentance *follows*, but does not *precede* the sense of forgiveness. The repentance which precedes may be characterized by more *agony*, yet it is less rich, clear, and melting. The reception of the prodigal, as illustrating the sinner received by our heavenly Father, exhibits—the *Divine mercy toward man*; his *reinstatement into the privileges of a son of God*; and the *joy caused by the conversion of men*.

*Man is an object of divine mercy.* This could not be set forth more affectingly than it is in the actions of the father. For years his heart had yearned over that wandering child. He had prayed

for his return and recovery. And lo ! he approaches the house. The father waits not in silent reserve, to test the genuineness of his penitence, as Joseph did that of his brethren. He flies to meet him. He does not recoil from the swinish reek, which even this distance has not dispelled. He does not draw back with dignity from the tattered, bloated beggar. He is not ashamed to embrace him in the public way.\* Without waiting for a word of explanation, he falls on his neck and kisses him tenderly. His whole soul is moved within him. For the expression, "had compassion on him," does not convey the richness of the original. It was not mere pity, as we have compassion on an outcast ; the word denotes the whole *emotional nature of man*, as it shows itself in love, kindness, and generosity. This was moved into its liveliest exercise, and was wrought up into a powerful passion. And that kiss was not only a token of affection, but a pledge of reconciliation. It was such a kiss as Esau gave Jacob, when they met after years of angry separation—a kiss denoting that all past hatred and differences were cancelled.

Now all this is a meagre draft of God's love to man. For there is this vital difference, that when the divine mercy was exhibited in the plan of redemption, man had not taken the first step toward return. He was living in sin. He had not come to himself. He had not resolved to go to his Father.

\* Stier's Words of Jesus.

And what shall we say of God's love in the gift of Jesus Christ? Nothing in the acts of the prodigal's father corresponds to that.

We might assert that man is *the* object of divine mercy. We know of no other creature towards whom God has so exhibited mercy. His love to us was free and sovereign. What are men compared to angels, seraphs, cherubs? Might he not have sent sinning Adam headlong to the pit, as he sent the rebels of heaven before him; and have made another man, and another race? What caused the difference? Divine mercy. If the fallen angels are monuments, to the entire universe, and throughout all eternity, of *God's justice*; certainly man is a monument of God's *mercy*, to the entire universe, and throughout all eternity. *Justice* is written on the brow of every lost spirit; *mercy* is engraved on the golden crown of every saint in heaven.

*The repenting sinner is reinstated as a son of God.* The highest expectation of the prodigal had been that he might become a hired servant. And if he was amazed at the cordial greeting, that amazement must have transcended all bounds, when "the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this *my son* was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." My son! Not the mere words, but those acts make him such—*the robe, the ring, the shoes.*

Here we have the taking back of the penitent. By repentance and faith in Christ, man comes back to his home—to his father. This is his proper place. Here are the objects he ought to love. This is the being to whom he should yield obedience. But how wonderful that he should be exalted to become an inmate of God's family! an heir! a joint heir with Christ! How great the dignity conferred on repenting man! Well may we be surprised at that superabounding grace, which did not stay at bringing us into heaven, but has advanced us to glory and honour there. In that blissful home, ransomed sinners might have dwelt by themselves, as did Israel in Egypt; and then we should be constrained to praise God for this grace. But not so. Saints, who once were full of sin and corruption, cluster about the throne, mingle with angels, and follow "the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

This unexpected and speedy replacement of the younger son was not a hasty act, which the too kind father should have deferred awhile. He saw that the son was fitted for this restoration. He was another man. The father saw the filial spirit, which never before was possessed. He was more truly a son, than when first introduced to us.

And in like manner the penitent believer is prepared to be a son. *He* has a new heart. Another spirit is within him. He now acknowledges God's claims. He cheerfully submits to his rule. He esteems his commandments concerning all things to

be right. Sinful indulgences are loathed. His heart is better. Many of the unclean beasts have been expelled. The Holy Spirit is there. Sweet thoughts of heaven are there. In him abideth the love of God. His nature is changed. He is becoming sanctified. Thus is he fit for the church here, and the church above.

But let us consider more in detail the *several acts* of this re-establishment of the prodigal; and that which is signified by them in the returning sinner. There was *a robe to cover, a ring to honour, and shoes to protect.*

*A robe to cover.*—"Bring forth the best robe and put it on him." Opulent families in the East kept a large supply of garments. These have been known to number several thousands. Much of their wealth consisted in them. These garments were for the use of guests. And I suppose the custom prevailed for this reason: Travelling in those countries was mostly performed on foot; consequently very little, if indeed any extra clothing could be carried. A traveller's garments, therefore, would soon become greatly soiled, and unfit to come in contact with the soft mats or dwains in a room. As the opulent were the entertainers of respectable travellers, they kept garments for their use. And in their weddings and convivial entertainments, it was the custom to provide each invited guest with a suitable robe. The father directs his servants to this wardrobe. But mark the emphasis. He does

not say, bring out *a* robe; but *the* robe, the *best* robe. The choicest of his whole wardrobe was to be put on this former vagrant.

This at once suggests to us the robe of Christ's righteousness, with which the sinner is clothed. For the justification of the believing sinner is compared to a robe. "He hath clothed me with the garments of praise, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." Is. lxi. 10. "I counsel thee to buy of me white raiment that thou mayest be clothed." Rev. iii. 18. "And to her [the church] was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the *righteousness of saints.*" Rev. xix. 8. This righteousness is the atonement, whereby the Lord Jesus made propitiation for sin. Very aptly is this compared to a robe. A robe covers a person, hides deformity, or maiming. On that prodigal's body may have been the scars and ulcers of sin. His return had not eradicated them from his system. But the garment concealed them. And the believer is not rendered a perfect man by his repentance and faith. He has *a different spirit and a better heart*, yet many an old sore remains, which will trouble him as long as he lives. But for all that he is a son; and clothed in the righteousness of his Saviour, he is regarded as without spot or blemish. All his defects are covered, his sins are cancelled, and no more brought to notice. Christ's righteousness, the robe, is that at which God looks, and he is satisfied.

The prodigal is clothed with *the* robe, the most costly of all in the house. And it is the most precious robe in Jehovah's realm, which clothes the returning sinner. "For we are not redeemed with silver and gold, but with the *precious blood of Christ*," who being the eternal son of God died for us. This is no ordinary robe. It is more than a heavenly robe; it is *godly*. It is not the robe of an angel, but of a God. It is *that* robe, which our loving Father has preserved from all eternity. For from the bosom of the Father came this Redeemer. It is the righteousness of a God, who became man, which acquits the believer from the penalty of the law. Just here we encounter Christ in this parable. Many attempts have been made to explain the absence of a reference to the mediating propitiation of the Son of God. But this mediation is no more denied by silence, than is the seduction of Satan denied, because no mention is made of it in the apostasy of the sinner, as described by the follies of the younger son. Christ and the Father are *one* here, as they are in heaven. And sufficiently for the purpose, is the mediation of the gospel typified in that best, long-reserved robe.

*A ring was placed upon his finger.* To give a ring was a mark of affection, as with us. Also by it office was conferred. When Joseph had interpreted Pharaoh's dream, that monarch took the ring off his own finger, and put it on Joseph's; and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen; and thus he



was advanced to the highest office in the land. Likewise upon the advancement of Mordecai, the king gave him the ring, which he had taken from Haman, when that man was deprived of his office. These rings were generally signet-rings, by which documents could be sealed in the king's name. The giving the ring to the prodigal, denoted his permanent re-establishment in his father's house.

And thus permanently is the believer established in the family of God. He is adopted. The presence of the Holy Ghost in his heart, by whom he is sealed unto the day of redemption, is the ring of adoption; or, as Paul says, speaking of this Father—"who hath also *sealed* us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts," 2 Cor. i. 22. The believer is not his own, but God's; he obeys him. By bringing forth fruits meet for repentance he is doing the will of his Father in heaven. Well may the adopted child of God exclaim, in the language of the faithful in Isaiah, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." Isaiah lxi. 10.

"*Put shoes on his feet,*" said the father. The son returned without shoes. When, therefore, the father commanded them to be put on, it was carrying out still further his intention not to treat that

son as a servant ; for *they* did not wear shoes. This adds another to the images which signify that God will treat with kindness and affection those who return to him. Or, as the Psalmist has it, "The Lord will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly." Shoes were to protect the feet ; and God protects his returning children. They need it. The devil tries hard to get them back. Many will be the temptations to leave the Father. Nature is only imperfectly renewed ; its propensities are still depraved. A deceitful heart may yet lead astray. The believer needs this protecting power of God, that the work of *sanctification* may progress in the soul. And so, perhaps, without attempting a fanciful interpretation, we may say, that as the robe represents justification, and the ring represents adoption, the shoes also represent sanctification. Because it is by the *protection and assistance* of the Holy Ghost that the believer advances in holiness. Possessed of this, the work is sure. He is unconquerable. God has given the complete armour.

" There's not a chain,  
That hellish foes confederate for his harm,  
Can wind around him, but he casts it off  
With as much ease as Samson his green withes."

The reception of the prodigal caused rejoicing in that family. And in accordance with human nature, a *feast* was made to express the joy at his return. For by festivity do men express their gladness.

“Bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry.” The wealthier husbandmen were provided with fatted calves, to meet any sudden and extraordinary call upon their hospitality. Veal was reckoned a great delicacy among the Orientals; taking very much the place of poultry with us.

The occasion was also made gleeful by music and dancing. And does our Lord by this sanction *dancing*? Does he pronounce anything in its favour by the connection in which he puts it? This description by no means opens up the lawfulness, or unlawfulness, of dancing as we understand it. For the whole question may be dismissed by a single statement. The dancing here alluded to, was not of that kind with which we are familiar. For the dances of the Jews were performed by the sexes *separately*. There is no evidence from Sacred History that the diversion was promiscuously enjoyed, except it may be at the erection of the golden calf at Sinai, when, in imitation of the Egyptian festival of Apis, all classes of the Hebrews intermingled in the frantic revelry. In the sacred dances, although both sexes seem to have borne a part in the procession or chorus, they remained in distinct or separate companies. This feature is retained in those dances which form a part of the worship of the Shaking Quakers. Notwithstanding the strong partiality cherished for this amusement, it was considered beneath the dignity

of persons of rank and character to practise it. The words of Cicero—"that no one dances unless he is either drunk or mad," express the prevailing opinion as to the impropriety of respectable persons taking part in it. The Jews left dancing to the women, who made it an especial mode of expressing their feelings. Hence, companies of women would, by dancing around a returning army, express their joy at their safe return. The gay circles of Rome and its provinces derived all their entertainment, as is done in the East to this day, from the exhibition of professional dancers.\* Did modern society thus hire the *dancers* as well as the music, many troubled consciences would have rest. From all this it will be perceived that dancing on this festive occasion of the prodigal's return, makes nothing for the practice among us.

But the idea conveyed is this—the return of that younger son caused great joy. And so we believe there is joy at the return of the sinner to God. It is worthy of notice, that joy over the lost found constitutes the closing scene of each parable. The man who lost his sheep, when he cometh home, "call-eth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me ; for I have found my sheep which was lost." The woman, who had lost the piece of money, " calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me ; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say un-

\* Kitto's Cyclopædia, and Smith's Dictionary of the Bible.

to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." But how do the angels know when a sinner is converted from the error of his ways? Is the announcement made in the heavenly region? We may not speculate on these things. We must not attempt to uncover what God has hidden. Our place now is in the outer court, among the earthly worshippers; when we enter the Holy of Holies, we shall understand all about this joy. But one valuable truth is certainly presented by all these exhibitions of joy—viz: the conversion of one soul is a MATTER OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE. And this harmonizes with the teachings of Scripture, which impress on us the value of even *one* human being in the sight of God. And in no language is this presented, more penetrating, than in the sublime question of our Lord—"What shall it profit a man, though he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul!" Christianity attaches a value to the individual, which is found in no other religion. It does not absorb him in one all-comprehending Deity; nor does it make him, as in Pantheism, like one cog in a great wheel of humanity. He is himself now, and ever shall be. And therefore God prizes him, even as He does an angel. Hence arises the ardent zeal of Christianity for every soul—no matter how degraded, ignorant, or besotted. For it sees in that soul a priceless jewel. And therefore it pants to put it in Jesus' crown.

And it must ever make superhuman effort to save *every creature*. Nor can it cease, until *all* nations are brought home again. Here is the spirit of missions. *This* is its fountain head.

Heaven rejoices and so does the converted soul. God gladdens the heart of the returning sinner. As the prodigal sat at that reunion feast, he found its merriness affording far richer joy than he had experienced in all his riotous living. And as the believer receives the tokens of God's favour in his heart, he prizes the few hours of this peace and joy in believing, more than all the pleasures of the world. Religion is a continual feast to his soul. To pray and praise is a most delightful employment. The soul, tossed by convictions of sin, now anchors in the quiet waters of God's reconciliation. The clouds roll away. The sun shines. All nature is joyous. Everything wears a new aspect. Nature even seems more significant; for every part of it has something to say to him of the love and goodness of God.

“Oh! what tongue can express  
The sweet comfort and peace  
Of a soul in its earliest love?

Oh! the rapturous height  
Of that holy delight,  
Which I felt in the life-giving blood!  
Of my Saviour possessed,  
I was perfectly blessed,  
As if filled with the fulness of God.

Then all the day long,  
 Was my Jesus my song,  
 And redemption through faith in his name :  
 Oh that all might believe,  
 And salvation receive,  
 And their song and their joy be the same !”

It may be, dear reader, that with a sigh you exclaim, such a glorious and loving reception, so speedy and so full, I never experienced with all my repentance. Yet you need not despair of attaining it. Nor should you write bitter things against yourself. Think less of your sins, and more of Jesus. Lo! where stood that mountain of sin, the cross is now planted. “Often the *heart* may be right, earnest, sincerely loving God, while the mind may be much clouded, and the heavenly light seem but the merest dawn upon the soul. But the soul willing to receive Jesus as the way, and to be satisfied with him; as its truth, and to be contented therewith; as its life, and to rejoice therein, in the spirit of trusting, choosing love,—is surely safe, and surely right, however obscure may be some of its views, and however short of the truth may be some of its conclusions. Jesus will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. The one he will bind up and strengthen, the other he will fan into a bright flame. Your heart may be ready to sink with fears. You may ask a hundred times, if I am truly loving and seeking God, why am I thus? But you are under Divine guidance, and on a new and heavenward path. Intermit none of your

religious duties. Praise God with the best powers you have. Love him, and go tell him you love him. Trust him, and doubt not his readiness to bless you. Believe in Jesus Christ. Take the Lord as he is offered to you in his word. Make him your only portion. And however weak your faith may be, it is that faith which is the gift of God ; which is real and faileth not.”\*

\* Dr. TUNG.



## CHAPTER X.

## THE ELDER BROTHER OR THE MORAL MAN.

*Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry and would not go in; therefore came his father out and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me; and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost and is found.*

AT the opening of this parable of the Prodigal Son, we are informed, “A certain man had two

sons." The history of the younger we have concluded. Now that of the other opens. And what part does he bear? How are we to explain his demeanour? It has a meaning; for it is more than the mere filling up.

Many have been the puzzling questions raised over it. Undoubtedly the primary design was to rebuke the Pharisees, who complained that publicans and sinners came freely to Christ. They could not but apply to themselves the heartless and supercilious conduct of the elder brother. We may understand that the younger son personates the Gentiles, while the elder represents the Jews; but does it reach no wider? Or has it a never-failing application? As we discover the prodigal in every place, in every man, at some time of his history; can we not discover also this elder son? Errors have arisen from a desire to explain *details* of this portion of the parable. Some of the details are merely the earthly picture, the pigment, with which we need not expect anything in the moral or religious to correspond. Let us rather inquire what is the main idea. And as a necessary and preparatory step, let us regard the import of the *whole* parable. Whatever it may have been to those who heard it from our Lord's lips, certainly to us it can have but one purport. It is a life-sketch of *man sinning and God receiving him*; how man is to come, and how God receives him. It is sin and redemption in epitome. The *whole*, therefore, must have a bearing

on this subject—the *elder son* equally with the *younger*. While the wandering of that youth furnishes an apt illustration of the apostasy and degeneracy of man; he particularly personifies the open and covert transgressor. Now, is there any other class among us to be represented? Certainly. Are there not in all communities the moral and upright, against whom not even suspicion breathes a word? Are there not those who can say as did the youth to our Lord, “All these [commandments] have I kept from my youth up;” and concerning whom Christ can reply, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven?” To me the elder son is an apt illustration of this class, of those who are denominated *moral* men, as distinguished from the pious man. In old theology these were termed *legalists*—those striving to reach heaven by their own goodness. My object now is to trace out the resemblance between the elder son and this class.

A prominent fact in regard to the elder son was, that *he remained at home*. No demon of discontent had allured him away from the father’s house. He seems to have been dutiful and industrious. He was at work in the fields, taking care of his father’s estate, when the prodigal came home. In like manner with this class I have mentioned; they have not tarnished their characters; they have maintained a fair name. Into no paths of vice, or of improper conduct have they wandered; they have remained at home; and in a measure have been

zealous for God's cause, and for the advancement of religion, purity, and all the virtues. Largely they have contributed to the support and extension of the gospel—much more, many of them, than have the majority of the professed followers of Christ. Even the church herself has leaned upon them. They love us, and have built us synagogues. Noble men they are! Most praise-worthy is their conduct! We cannot help asking, what would the church do without them? Their loss would be as deeply felt, as would have been the absence of the elder brother from that household.

But though he remained at home, *he had not the spirit of a son nor of a brother*. His demeanour was correct. Men could discern no fault. He had not been guilty of the excesses which disgraced the younger son; yet *at heart* he was no better than that wanderer had been. For see how he acted. As he approached the house, he heard the sounds of festivity. He inquired what it meant. A servant informed him that the long-lost brother, *his only* brother, had come back. At these words does he not rush in, just as he is, in the garb of toil, and clasp that brother in his arms? No! A demon of hate and sullenness possesses him. "He was angry, and would not go in." And what was he angry about?—that for this brother, restored as from the dead, a feast should be made. He could have rejoiced if a strayed sheep had come back to the fold, but when it is his own brother he is angry;

not indifferent, but *angry*. Alas ! what a sorry picture of the heart does this present. Well may we say, he had not a right spirit.

Can we apply this to the moralist ? Yes ! for *they* have not the right *spirit*. Can they claim to be the sons of God, when they have an unfilial spirit ? For unless God be supreme in the heart, there *is* an unfilial spirit. The heart gives value to all we do. How the obedience of this elder son depreciates in our estimation, when this ungenerous feeling breaks out ! At once we grow suspicious of the whole man. We are prepared for some other ignoble manifestation of heart. And can this obedience of yours, my moral reader, upon which you are wont to look with so much satisfaction, be of any more value than the elder brother's, if accompanied by a similar heart ? Consider for a moment whether God can regard these *externals* of service ; or, to go deeper, whether he can be satisfied with that RESPECT you bear him. Not for an instant do we speak disparagingly of your service, as though it, or you, were hypocritical ; or as though you designed it as a subterfuge. What you do is commendable, and would that all men were of the same character. We do not object to these acts themselves ; but we do protest against your making THEM *your religion*, your mediator, your *Christ*—that which shall atone for sins. These acts of service cannot make a ladder long enough, strong enough to reach from earth to heaven. Like Chal-

mers and Scott, when they first began to preach, and before they saw themselves to be wretched sinners, needing a divine Saviour, you can discourse on the *attributes of the Deity*. But your system, as did theirs, goes not beyond sublime ideas of the divine omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, and goodness; combined with some lively conceptions of the character, the teaching, and the example of Jesus Christ the author of Christianity. You go into a rapturous adoration of the Great Being, but there you stop. What you lack is *Christ*. What place do you assign Him in your system? God the Father is there, but *where* is God the Son? And do you inquire, what need of God the Son for me? Just the need which that Son himself declared—"He that honoureth the Son, honoureth the Father also; he that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father."

The absence of a filial spirit in the elder brother is further evident, from the manner in which he met the father's entreaty that he would lay aside his anger. "Lo, these many years do *I* serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandments." Proud words, which reveal and condemn himself without needing any further testimony. "These many years *do I serve thee*," is the keynote upon which the whole strain is pitched. As though he were not that very moment transgressing the two laws—thou shalt honour thy father, thou shalt love thy brother.\* Precisely in this strain

\* Stier's Words of Jesus.

the Pharisee prayed—"God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all I possess."

A similar spirit is seen in the legalist. "Do I not serve thee?" is the secret question ever put to God. "What more would you have me do? Can any man bring a complaint against my conduct? Whom have I injured? The Sabbath I have observed. The sanctuary I have frequented. *Do I not serve Thee?*" No! for you have never penetrated into the heart of God's service. "Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God *with all thy heart*, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength." Do you serve him by prayer, and love, and faith? And there is pride in this question. You challenge God to search out secret faults; can you abide his investigation of thought, and word, and motive, and feeling? Oh learn these three fearful truths. "We may think ourselves to be keeping all the commandments of God, while keeping in our heart the principle of all transgression, *pride* of heart. We may boast of our own righteousness while committing, in the very boast, the heaviest sins. We may live among all the gifts of grace in their actual offer, and seeming possession, and yet not possess or receive them at all."\*

Indeed, let none of us forget ourselves in this pride and envy of the elder son. We witness in

\* Stier's Words of Jesus, vol. 4, p. 161.

him a life-like scene. That spirit which regards with envy the superior attainments, advantages, or position of another; that which asks why God has given them what he withholds from us; in health, or comforts, or prosperity; that which reasons we might fare as well as these sinners—is the spirit of the elder brother. The eccentric, but most devout and genuine Daniel Krummacher, of Elberfeld, was once asked, in an assembly of his brethren discussing this question, who, in his view, was the elder son. He solemnly said, “I well know now, for I learned it yesterday.” Being asked further, he laconically said, *Myself!* and then confessed that yesterday it had fretted his heart to find that a very ill-conditioned person had suddenly been enriched with a remarkable visitation of grace.

Another remark of the elder brother presents a feature of the moralist’s experience. In his petulant reply to his father, he said, “Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.” No doubt this was incorrect. Petulance leads to exaggeration, if not positive falsehood. Besides, he was angry; and an angry man’s talk must be received with caution. If he had never invited his friends to a festival, it was because he did not want them. His father did not stand in the way of any such enjoyment. It is evident that *he had no joy in his service of the father*. It was a harsh, constrained villainage, while he constantly yearned for by-pleasures in which he dare not engage.



All this is literally true of the legalist. He has not even a kid over which to rejoice. It is all hard work with him. He looks over the fence with wistful eyes. And if he were not afraid of losing his soul, he would become the prodigal. Of the joy of forgiveness which thrills the heart of the converted sinner, he knows nothing. He tries to practise the Christian's self-denial, without the heavenly comforts which assist the believer. He is a stranger to keeping the commandment from the spontaneous impulse of love. The enjoyments of godliness he has never experienced. The blessedness of a religious life has never visited him. He abides in the cold atmosphere of his own self-sufficiency. He is his own blessedness. He seeks it not in Christ. Prayer and praise are only the accompaniments of his worship; they are not the overflowings of the heart. He tries to draw pleasures by tapping earthly cisterns; but they soon fail. He is always changing, and never realizes any abiding good.

The elder son could not understand why there should be *so warm a welcome to his profligate brother*. Had he not disgraced the family? Had he not wasted his living with harlots? What was there in him to merit so much regard?

A similar difficulty arises in the mind of the moral man. If these men of disgraceful lives, and charged with flagrant sins, are saved, what shall hinder me, who have none of these sins to answer

for? The atonement of the Saviour is needed for them, to wash away their sins; but I have no such sins to be washed away, and therefore, I do not need that Saviour. But what credit can you claim for not falling into his sins? Have you been severely tempted to them? Is not much of our morality due to favourable circumstances? Education, family, position, temperament, have been powerful checks which have saved us from excesses. Therefore, we must judge of our guilt from another point. We must look at other than heinous transgression. Certainly we cannot claim to be innocent of a thousand sins of thought and heart. All malice, envy, hatred, however feebly they may show themselves within us, are sinful. However we regard them, the law of the Lord declares them to be vile. In Levitical worship sacrifice was required for trifling sins; and even for sins of ignorance, *i. e.* acts, which *at the time*, a man did not perceive to be sinful. Yet he must confess them, and seek pardon for them. Now, this teaches just what the gospel asserts—that for every idle thought and word we are to be brought into judgment. And the unfilial, undevout heart, concerning which we have already spoken, is a constant sin.

You may wonder that a prodigal can be received while you are rejected. It may seem all wrong; and yet it is entirely consonant with justice and holiness. He is received because he repents, turns from his evil way, loves the God whom he disre-

garded, and desires, above all things, to do his will. He obeys not from fear, or out of respect, but because he loves to obey. He accepts the Saviour, while you reject him. And that very Saviour hated Sodom's lewdness and open vice; but he hated yet more Bethsaida's heart of unbelief. You do not repent. You have no new nature. Externally you may seem the better man; but God, who regards the heart, sees in him a spirit which you do not possess. You deserve much less the name of son than he does.

Let us however consider this somewhat more fully. For its importance requires, that we should not dismiss it in this brief manner.

You are ever comparing your good works with the Christian's conduct. And because, in your estimation, those deeds seem as virtuous and as praiseworthy as his, you cannot understand how it can be, that if the Christian is saved, you cannot be saved, when you have an equal, perhaps a larger, amount of good works. No doubt this is a serious difficulty to many a thoughtful mind. We will endeavour to show the radical mistakes of the moralist as he thus reasons.

With him there is an absence of *God as the chief object of thought and affection*. The Psalmist's frame of mind was, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." Every child of God finds the same sentiment in some degree pervading his soul. But nothing like this is found in the heart of the merely

moral man. And the want of it is like the absence of sunlight. There is no warmth of piety, and no growth of plants of grace. It affects all he does. It gives a tinge and a tone even to every good act. The absence of that filial temper of dependence, veneration, and love, which should be the natural bent of the soul towards God, constitutes the fatal defect in those amiable, lovely persons, who by their virtues shame the inconsistencies of professing Christians. The best affections are bestowed on everything but God. The loveliest natures do thus virtually exile him from the world which he has made and daily sustains. Kindness, gratitude, love, which are the very feelings he has implanted, take root, grow, and blossom, to bear fruit for all but him.

Well may he exclaim, "I have nourished and brought up children, but they have rebelled against me." Men love and hate—and often rightly too,—but without thought of God's will. They are not guided in their likes and dislikes by the law of God, by that which he pronounces right or wrong. Before entering upon a path of duty, they do not inquire, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" In their very noblest deeds they have been moved by compassion for others, or by some human motive, not from a regard to what God requires. *He* has not been in all their thoughts. So that much which is beautiful in our best impulses, is beautiful only as the flower or landscape is beautiful, because they

are faultless ; but not beautiful, as is a holy being who is good in himself ; good because he is like God ; good because he watches and obeys the Divine will.\*

Now this pre-eminence of God in all we do and think, is that which characterizes the Christian ; while the lack of it is the fatal blemish of the moralist. He would pay a tribute to God, but will not bestow the whole heart. God comes in as one of the objects of life, along with self-indulgence and ambition. He has not learned the primary truth that his chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever. Just here we begin to perceive wherein the virtues of the one differ from the virtues of the other. It is a difference not distinguishable by all, hence the misjudgment so common when contrasting the Christian with others.

Let us illustrate in a measure this difference. Place a corpse beside a living man, and contrast the two. The living man has a head with eyes, nose, mouth and cheeks, so has the corpse. And the resemblance may be even more exact, for the corpse may have an expressive countenance, the look of life, aye, almost the freshness of health. And proceeding further, if you were to examine the internal structure of each, you would find them the same there ; for the dead man has lungs, heart, veins and blood, and all the vital organism, even as has the living man. Wherein consists the difference ? Each

\* W. Allen Butler's Sermons.

has a heart—but in the one the heart beats, in the other it is silent. Each has veins, but the blood courses through the one with the bound of life, in the other it is chilled. And so as you compare the Christian and the moralist, you perceive a similarity. Does the Christian attend church regularly? so does the moral man. Is the Christian liberal in his gifts for the Bible, and for missions, and for the varied agencies of the church? equally prompt and liberal is the moral man. In all outward deportment, you can perceive no difference. Where then shall we find it? Just where we discovered the difference between the corpse and the living man—at *the heart*. Each has a heart with the same psychological structure of thought and emotion, but the Christian's heart beats in sympathy with holy and heavenly things, takes a delight in the praise and worship of its Maker, puts all its hopes in him, leans on him all the day long, loves him, and thinks of him. It holds "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." The story of the cross melts it to the outflowing of tears. But that other heart lacks all these blessed emotions. It is cold and unfeeling toward God. Now, out of that Christian heart, all good thoughts and words flow spontaneously. Its deeds are not the fabrications of the hands, as the potter moulds the clay to vessels of beauty; but they are love's own offspring—the outgoings of a heart that cannot do enough for God, and which is ever bewailing its feeble efforts to

glorify him who redeemed it with his own precious blood. The moralist is ever speaking of his works, calling attention to them, and asking if they are not perfect; while the Christian is silent, or only sighs, after having done all, "I am an unprofitable servant."

And now we may carry our figure yet further, and place beside this corpse of faultless proportions, a hunchback, the lineaments of whose face are painfully ugly. As a specimen of the human body, how much more perfect, harmonious, and attractive is this corpse! Were we to chisel out a statue from the marble, certainly we should choose this corpse for our model, rather than the hunchback. And yet, who does not regard the hunchback more than the corpse? we bury the latter, but protect and assist the former. Why is this? Ah! the hunchback, with all his deformity, is a *living* man. And now, put in contrast our perfect moral man, with the faulty Christian. If we were to choose a pattern of manliness, we would imitate the former; for in him are amiabilities, and noble traits which make us love him. His record is unblotted, while the Christian has fallen into sin and been reclaimed. And yet this Christian, with his unlovely traits, is a true child of God, with a heart right in God's sight. He deplores his frailties, and strives against them. Secret places witness his deep abasement at the foot of the cross. He cries out all night for pardon, and deliverance from sin. He loves God

with all his heart, and would cheerfully go to the martyr's stake. He is a faulty Christian, but may not God love him, even as we prefer the ugly-looking hunchback to the cold, lifeless corpse? May not God see more in that Christian to admire, than in the faultless, but heartless moralist?

With this light we may comprehend how David, guilty though he was of heinous crimes, could yet be called the *man after God's own heart*. Notwithstanding these blemishes God loved him. For God was to him "the chief end." His worship was more dear than palace, friends, or family. For when an exile for a few days, his irrepressible desire was that he might again come to the sanctuary of God. In all the Psalms, David's piety is clearly seen, with his unflinching trust in God, and his longing that Jehovah's name should be magnified. These traits of the inner man made David the model; so that even of the best of his successors it was only said, "He did not walk after God with a perfect heart, as did David his father."

Now, it may seem strange that God can take delight in men manifestly so imperfect. But let us ever remember the words of Samuel to Jesse—"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." And here it is that the moral man faileth. His *heart* is astray from God. In all his calculations of duty, he forgets that religious affections must exist in the heart; and that these religious affections are a part of the duty



which God requires of man. His attention and his efforts are directed to outward things. While he acknowledges, he yet is not really impressed with the truth, that God reads the thoughts and emotions. Hence, almost unconsciously, he deals with the Omniscient, as though he could go no farther than to what is said or done. He deceives himself with the proposition, that as a fair name and reputable conduct commend him to men, it must also render God favourable to him, despite the state of his heart. While pressing this thought, we would carefully guard against the rebound which may send the mind to the dangerous extreme, that if the heart is the main thing, then the conduct is of little account. This was the perversion of a precious truth, which Paul encountered, and which he meets with the question, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" We have raised no bulwark behind which imperfect Christians may skulk; nor do we pretend that their sins are less heinous before God, than the sins of others—we rather design to guard against a false judgment, which prevails in the minds of numbers who compare their lives with the conduct of Christians, and finding them equally fair, conclude that if these are saved, they shall be; whereas, it is not the conduct alone which is to be regarded, but also the heart. It is to save from so deadly an error as this, that we endeavour to show, that an imperfect Christian, whose heart is set on God, may be acceptable to him, notwithstanding his defects.

As to the sins and misconduct of Christians, God will provide a punishment. They are not to escape the consequences of open sin. Most severely did David suffer for his sin against Uriah. And the believer, as well as the unbeliever, has found that the way of the transgressor is hard.

That we are correct, in thus calling the attention of the moral man to the state of the heart, is further evident, from the fact that our Lord himself took this very course, in the well-known interview with Nicodemus. That man was strictly moral. Indeed, he was more, for he is presented as an example of the devout ritualist, who combined, with a reputable name, a punctilious observance of all religious ordinances. You will notice that our Saviour, in dealing with him, pushes aside the mantle of respectability, and the garments of the virtues and amiabilities, and cuts through the flesh of religious performances, until he *touches the heart*. Reaching that, he utters the startling words, "It must be born again."

Dear reader, listen to those words. They are intended for you, else they had not been preserved. For what is Nicodemus to us? Nothing. But the truth—a foundation truth of the Bible—associated with that midnight interview, will continue, and go wherever this gospel is preached. The great truth for you to learn is, that you must be renewed in heart; and that a total and thorough change must take place there. All your outward amendments

are but the garnishing of the sepulchre. In your heart, you must be formed again after the image of Him who created us. You must not think to patch up the old building, repaint it, and remodel it; you must begin at the foundation. There must be new principles, new motives, new desires implanted in the heart.

Be persuaded, that for this, there can be no *equivalent*. For some things no equivalent can be rendered. They cannot be commuted for, we must perform the thing itself, and in our own person, or be held delinquent. There can be no equivalent for filial love. The child may outwardly respect his parents, may lavish presents upon them, and never allow them to want, but would these compensate for the lack of love? So is it in our relation to God. He demands the homage of the heart. That heart was so constituted by him, as to be able to render homage. Nothing else therefore can be an equivalent for that homage. If we withhold it, and in its place offer our virtues, our amiabilities, our beneficence, our gifts for the spread of the gospel, our co-operation in good enterprises; we are not thereby rendering God an equivalent for the love he demands. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not *love*, it profiteth me nothing." Yea, more, though I did much beyond this, and made superior religious attainments, and could "speak with the tongue of men and of an-

gels, and have not *love*, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I had the gift of prophecy, and understood all mysteries and all knowledge," and had not *love*, I would be nothing. Because I might have these, while my heart is unmoved by love to my Maker. And all these could not compensate for the want of love.

The parable opens with a happy home, and closes with that home again made joyful, after a season of sorrow. And the Bible opens with the quiet of Eden, and closes with the joy of heaven as delineated in the new Jerusalem. A similar contrast may be drawn in our individual histories. God permits many of us to begin our existence in the quiet of an earthly home. But where shall that existence be continued? That is the great question. And *that* is for us to decide. In a few years our final condition will be for ever determined. Shall we have a mansion in the skies, or shall we roll amid the fiery billows of hell? Who would not have a home in heaven? And yet there is danger of losing it. For unless we repent and believe upon Jesus Christ we cannot be saved. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Whatever else we have, unless we are resting upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation, we have not that which renders us acceptable with God.

We are all erring children. If we have gone to the excesses of the younger son, let us stop now in our career of folly and wickedness, and return to

our Father. If we have not been open sinners, still we shall find ourselves delineated in the elder son. We need a new heart, and a filial spirit. We may have the *form* of godliness, we must have its *power* in sanctifying the affections. “Turn unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon us, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.”

THE END.











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